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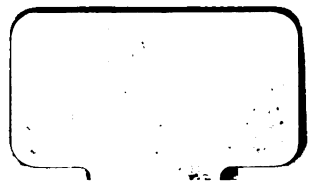

SOCIETY'S PUPPETS.

BY

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(MRS PENDER CUDLIP),

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SOCIETY'S PUPPETS.

THE GARVESTON LILY.

CHAPTER I.

WILLARD FOY'S cottage, down at the end of Garveston Quay, is well known to every sportsman and every yachting man who has any acquaintance with the West of England. It stands on velvet sward surrounded by laurel bushes that have attained the proportions of forest trees, close down on the verdant bank of a river that, half a mile beyond the cottage, rushes into the sea.

Garveston Quay is a private quay, the property of one of the most influential and wealthy commoners in a county that abounds with them. Lestrange of Garveston is a man of mark in his generation, for to the traditions of his ancestors he has added this one concerning himself, namely, that he is the hope of the Conservative party in the House, and that he has superadded to the indisputable beauty of his race an amount of brain-power that makes even the warmest friends of his family suspect that he was "changed at birth."

It is only within the last six months that Arthur Lestrange has come down and settled himself at Garveston Hall. Since his father's death, four years ago, his own have seen nothing and heard but little of the hope of the family, the pride of the county. But now he has come among them again in a manner that is most

acceptable to the inexorable "Mrs Grundy" of a country neighbourhood. He has come with the avowed intention of settling at Garveston permanently, and of shortly bringing home a wife. And he gets very much applauded for everything that he has done, is doing, and is going to do, when it becomes known that Lady Marguerite (familiarly "Daisy") Haughton, the daughter of the Earl of Glosshire, lord lieutenant of the county, is his bride-elect.

It will be a magnificent marriage—the "right man and woman in the right place"—every one who has an opinion on the subject allows. Lestrange has a firm conviction, and has contrived to imbue his friends with it, that his people "hunted Palestine with their own packs before Adam came upon the scene at all." When they "came over" cannot be determined, but at any rate they have been established in Glosshire long enough to be

included in the same paragraph with the Queen and Royal Family in the prayers of the Garveston congregation.

He is a splendid looking fellow, this scion of a pre-Adamite stock; beautiful with the crisp golden-haired, fair-skinned, blue-eyed beauty of a Norse god; tall, straight-limbed, athletic; "a rum one to follow, a good one to go" in the hunting field; an unerring shot, a practical, daring, devil-may-care sailor, always ready to crowd on full canvas however hard it may be blowing; and withal an accomplished gentleman, able to sing with artistically sweet subtlety in many other tongues than his own. On the whole, people who know them both say that Lady Marguerite Haughton, for all her stately, frigid, high-toned beauty, will have the best of the bargain in this alliance which is to be formed between herself and the untitled hope and prop of his party and county.

His father had died in his boyhood, and he had inherited the estate from his uncle, whose widow still lives in dowager state at the Gate House, a fine old Tudor mansion, to which the widows of the Lestranges have been relegated for many generations.

It may as well be admitted at once that the widowed Mrs Lestrange is a much happier, jollier, and altogether more agreeable woman now that her husband is dead, and she has no one to snarl at and supervise her, than she was as the reigning mistress of Garveston Hall. The late Mr Lestrange had the heavy crosses of liver complaint and a suspicious temperament laid upon him, and he made his wife feel the full weight of the burden they were to him. The poor lady tried to cry and feel sorrowful when he died, but all Garveston knew how galling his chains had been, and how relieved she must be to be free of them.

It is to this aunt at the Gate House that all Garveston goes now for information about the approaching marriage, for she always avers that she feels "like a mother to Arthur," and encourages the exhibition of kindly feeling and curiosity about him and his bride-elect, as if it were a laudable thing.

The county people, to whom she belongs by right of birth and position, are not nearly as congenial to Mrs Lestrange as are the wives and daughters of the village lawyer and doctor, and two or three widows and maiden ladies, who occupy pretty little cottages of gentility in the straggling, picturesque street. These assemble about her daily, calling in to tell her the harmless village gossip, and to show her some new design in crewel tablecloths or aprons from the fashion magazines. But chiefly do they pay their amiable homage to her on

Thursday afternoon, when she is "at home," and has five o'clock tea, and gives Garveston glimpses of other great county dames, who roll over from long distances to hold commune with the lady who is so much more at her ease as a widow than she ever was as a wife, that she forgets to lament over her own bereft and humbled state.

It is at one of these Thursday afternoons that Garveston is seen in all its glory. It has been known for some days, that not only the squire, but his bride-elect, Lady Marguerite, will be here, and there is a good deal of curiosity felt about the latter.

The two Miss Perrys, the lawyer's daughters, and Laura Dalton, the doctor's daughter, feel that they are showing a good deal of Christian charity in going to do honour to the young squire's betrothed. For they are all three pretty

girls, and the Lestranges have always been beauty lovers; and though, of course, it is only fitting that a Lestrange should marry rank, still there is no saying what might have happened, had he only gazed into the Perrys' beaming eyes before Lady Marguerite snapped him up in the season.

Lady Marguerite is quietly and comfortably ensconced in a corner by the time the Garveston guests get themselves into Mrs Lestrange's long, low, pretty, old-world drawing-room. The future mistress of Garveston Hall has consented to show herself to the "village people," as she calls them, but she has stipulated that she should not be required to talk to them.

"You say they want to see me. Let them look at me as much as they like," she says, languidly—for she is a great fool, in spite of her good blood and "Attic forehead and Phidian nose"—"but

don't ask me to talk to them; I should probably not understand them."

"Oh, they're very average nice girls, not at all cleverer than you are yourself," Arthur Lestrange says, a little impatiently, for he wants his Daisy to make a good impression upon his Garveston friends, and he feels that she does not mean to do it.

She passes them all in brief review as they come, and, to her own annoyance, she cannot find them either ridiculous or uninteresting. Not that she is an ill-natured girl in the main, but she is a bored and *blasé* girl, and it does seem very hard to her that she should be expected to do more than "show herself to the people," after the manner of queens and others, with whom it is her habit to identify herself.

Old Mrs Lestrange, the dear old apple-faced dowager, who is much happier in

her decay than in her full bloom, is perfectly satisfied with the way her little introductory entertainment is going, and with the way in which these Christians love one another.

"Yes," she says, in answer to a remark made by one of the Perry girls, "Lady Marguerite is the luckiest girl I know. I will *not* depreciate my nephew simply because he *is* my nephew, and therefore I repeat it—Lady Marguerite is the luckiest girl I know, or have ever known."

"I think Lady Marguerite is not too well pleased at being asked to meet us," Miss Perry says slowly; and at the same moment Lady Marguerite, who has been watching the colloquy between Mrs Lestrange and the representative young lady of the parish, rises, and slowly crosses the room to Miss Perry's side.

"You and I have met before, Miss Perry. Have you forgotten me?"

"I have forgotten the occasion of our meeting," Miss Perry says, with polite evasion; and Lady Marguerite shakes her head impatiently, and replies,—

"Try and recall it, then, without delay, if you please; I want you to do me a kindness." And then she bends her fair head nearer to the astonished young lady, whom she has singled out for the distinguished honour of her confidence, and speaks in so low a tone that not one of the multitude who are on the alert to catch the words of wit or wisdom which issue from her lips can make out what she is talking about.

As they stand together, the one speaking earnestly, the other listening intently, it is observed by more than one person that they are singularly alike in face and figure, in spite of certain marked differences of colouring and expression. For instance, they are both tall, well formed, and grace-

ful. But the "daughter of a hundred earls" has shoulders which slope in a weaker line than those from which Lily Perry's handsome little head springs. They both have fair hair and blue eyes; but Lady Marguerite's eyes, though large and sweet, are not so intensely blue or so beautifully fringed with dark curling lashes, nor is her yellow hair so golden when the light catches it, or so thick and wavy as the Garveston Lily.

Both are fair-skinned, but Lady Marguerite's transparent skin is more suggestive of ill-health, or at least of delicacy, than is Lily's creamy-white complexion. Both have a habit of carrying their heads high, but the high-born lady carries hers with less of the air of a young queen than does the daughter of the village lawyer. In fact, though they are alike, Lady Marguerite is but a faded edition of the other one; and though every one present

is disposed to concede the palm of beauty to the squire's bride-elect, they are all compelled to admit to themselves that Lily Perry has the rightful claim to it.

For a few minutes Lady Marguerite speaks in low and rapid tones, without waiting for an answer. Then she pauses, and Lily says a few words, which appear to both please and excite Lady Marguerite, for a slight additional tinge of colour comes into the blue-veined, transparent face, and the soft blue eyes sparkle a little. Thinking that there can be nothing between his Daisy and Miss Perry beyond the merest conventional intercourse, Mr Lestrange draws near them at this juncture, and hears Lady Marguerite say,—

"Then I may rely upon you, and you may rely on my friendship when I come to Garveston?"

"What's the mystery, Daisy?" Arthur

Lestrange says, laughingly. "Has Miss Perry promised you a new pattern for a high-art chair or cushion?"

"Yes; she's going to make clear a piece of work that I have muddled a good deal," Lady Marguerite replies, carelessly. "And, mamma, in order that she may let me know how she does it, you must ask Miss Perry to come over and see us."

Lady Glosshire looks up at her daughter's words, and smiles an invitation at Miss Perry.

"Very happy, I'm sure, if you will come to Cliff," she says, amiably. "My daughter doesn't take at all a proper interest in art needlework as a rule, but I'm devoted to it; and if you have any new stitch for me, or would let me show you some of mine—"

"Miss Perry will learn them with pleasure, I'm sure, mamma," Lady Mar-

guerite interrupts, impatiently and rudely; and Lily Perry refrains from saying that she knows nothing of high-art needle-work, and cares less, and accepts the invitation to Cliff, with an absence of anything approaching to a demonstration that rather surprises her sister.

"Lily," the latter says to her, when they are walking home through the village by-and-by, "what made Lady Marguerite single you out in such an odd way, and ask you to Cliff?"

"Perhaps Mr Lestrange wishes her to be civil to papa's daughters. Papa has had a good deal of bother, one way and another, you know, about the property while the squire has been away," Lily answers promptly.

"No, Lily, it's not that. We're both papa's daughters, and Lady Marguerite passed me by, with a look over my head that made me wish I hadn't gone to pay

court to her; while as for you, she went and whispered with you in a corner, just as if you had been school-girl friends."

"She didn't whisper!" Lily says indignantly.

"She did, Lily," the elder Miss Perry, who is not nearly so pleasant and pretty as her sister, persists; "and Laura thought that neither Mrs nor Mr Lestrange liked the whispering and giggling between you a bit; you know, for all his free, frank way, that the squire's a very proud man, and gets on his dignity in a minute if he thinks any one's going to try and encroach upon it."

"What a lecture for nothing; and I wish Laura Dalton would mind her own business, and not set you on to find fault with me," Lily says, flinging in through the open garden-gate in a fury, that her sister sees, is put on for the purpose of giving a turn to the conversation. And for an

hour or two, even during the family tea, there is discord and division in the house of Perry, because of the unaccountable honour which Lady Marguerite has shown to Lily.

By-and-by, long after the sun has set, and just as a sweet, refreshingly cool breeze has got up to purify the August air, Miss Perry puts on her hat and saunters down to the Daltons', where she is safe to find Laura and her brother in the garden at this hour. Laura is swinging in a hammock, and Fred is smoking the cigar which is not permitted in the house, and they are both delighted to see Miss Perry and talk over the future lady of Garveston with her.

"Why didn't Lily come down this evening?" Fred asks—for Lily is his boyhood's dream, and he is looking forward to taking orders in two or three years, and living an idyl with her on a curacy of a hundred a-year.

"Lily is out of sorts—rather high and

mighty to-night; this sudden friendship with Lady Marguerite and the invitation to Cliff has turned her head a little, I'm afraid," Miss Perry replies, with an air of good-humoured tolerance for her sister's weakness.

"I'll go up and fetch her to supper," Fred says. "It's a shame to talk of Lily being upset by anybody's notice. I believe you two are jealous of her. I shall go up and fetch her to supper, Laura, so you just see that there are plenty of flowers and tomatoes on the table."

With this he strides off, leaving Laura and Maria Perry to laugh at his boyish love for Lily—love which, though it is of the calf order, is very real and true, and which keeps him straight at college and awake at night very often.

"Poor Fred! how glad he is of the chance of a little walk by moonlight alone with Lily!" Laura laughs.

"I don't fancy he'll get the walk with her to-night," Maria rejoins. "Lily said, when I wanted her to come down with me, that she should stay in and make some plum jam to-night; it's our ironing day, you know, and we like making the jam over the copper-fire in the laundry."

"Did you think that Lady Marguerite seemed to care very much for the squire?" Laura asks, quitting the subject of Lily and the jam without any notice.

"No. Well, I'd hardly like to say that either. I should think she would always be most wonderfully cool and calm about such matters. However much she might care for a man in reality, she wouldn't think it good taste to show it."

"I hardly know about that," Laura says, reflectively. "Papa doesn't often tell us at home anything about his cases, but I remember a year ago he was called suddenly to Cliff to see Lady Marguerite.

She was very ill, and they had telegraphed to town for their own doctor, but before he came they got frightened about her, and sent for papa; she was desperately ill—low and depressed, you know—and papa said it was the mind, not the body; and as it could be no other trouble in her case—no want of money, or family worry—it must be love-sickness. Well, *that* couldn't have been on account of our squire, because directly he saw her in London this year, he made her an offer;—so, you see, Maria, she *can* feel, and *has* felt, cool and calm as she seems."

"Oh, nonsense! She doesn't look like a girl to fall in love or feel for anybody," Maria says; and they dismiss Lady Marguerite from their minds, and go into the house, presently, laden with flowers and tomatoes from the greenhouse, in order to make the supper-table "look pretty for Lily."

Meanwhile Fred trudges up to the Hill House, and (feeling almost like a son of it) sends his voice echoing through the garden directly he gets inside the gate.

"Lily, Lily!" he cries out joyously; and presently Lily's mother comes out to meet him, and says,—

"How have you missed her, Fred? She went out ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ago, to go to your house. Maria's there, isn't she?"

"Yes, Maria's there; but I haven't seen Lily," he says, disappointedly.

"Well, she may have gone in to the Slades', or to Mrs Welton's; you know she often spends an evening with her. Go and look for her, my boy; you're sure to find her at one house or the other."

The young lover turns on his quest, and the mother watches him as he walks away towards the garden gate.

"The girls must give up their childish

habit of running wild all over the place of an evening," Mrs Perry says to herself presently, turning back into her well-lighted, well-kept house. "It was all very well—" She pauses abruptly as a strange sound falls upon her ears; and in another moment Lady Marguerite Haughton, exclaiming, directing, and complaining in a breath, springs from a little brougham, and runs up the steps into the house.

The pretty patrician is clad in glistening blue silk and white lace, and pearls bind her fair hair becomingly over her brow. She is out of breath with emotion, apparently, for the exercise she has taken in leaping out of the carriage and up the steps could hardly account for the way in which she gasps out the words,—

"Is your daughter gone?"

"Gone — where?" the startled lady cries. "Is it Lily you want?" Mrs Perry adds, putting many things together.

"Yes; if Lily's the pretty one — the one like *me*—call her; she mustn't go."

"She's in the village, at the Dalton's, I think," Mrs Perry says, recovering herself. "What do you want of her?"

"I'm Marguerite Haughton," the other says quickly.

"What does your ladyship want of her?" Mrs Perry says punctiliously.

"Oh, nothing. Only a whim to take her home with me to Cliff to-night. I like her so much—that's the only reason, Mrs Perry—*really* the only reason. But she's *gone*, you say?"

The girl suddenly drops on to a hall-chair and begins to sob.

"Only into the village. Only to the Daltons'," Mrs Perry says soothingly; and as she says it Lady Marguerite springs to her feet, and says, with an air of childish caprice that is at variance with her frightened eyes,—

"Only in the village!—that's lucky, for I mean to take her home to-night with me. It's my whim, and I—and you—you'll *let* her come, won't you? Do send for her! Do find her!"

So they send to the Daltons', and to the rectory, and to Mrs Welton's, the widow lady who lives in the village street, and not one of them has seen Lily. And by-and-by Fred Dalton brings Maria home, and Lady Marguerite stands and hears them surmising all manner of things, till her lips grow white and her heart goes faint.

Some one saw Lily go down towards the river, Fred hears, and he starts off through the woods that border the river, in search of her.

But Lady Marguerite grows angry at their anxiety, and insists on going home at once, and is sorry that her having inquired for the young lady should have

made so much commotion—especially as it seems to be a habit of Miss Lily Perry's to be out at night, and no one to think anything of it.

Firing this parting shot, she re-enters her brougham and departs. But she sheds some bitter tears on her way home, and is more depressed than Lady Glosshire can at all understand at the disappointment she has had in the matter of bringing Lily back with her to Cliff.

Meanwhile, where is Lily?

CHAPTER II.

FOR the first time in her life, as she runs like a hare through the wood that borders the river towards Garveston Quay, Lily Perry is nervous, and fearful of the consequences of her own act.

She has embraced this adventure for adventure's sake, without any special liking, admiration, respect, enthusiasm, or even knowledge of the one who has induced her to do it. As she gets away out of the home meadow into the deep dark shade of the wood, the feeling that she is doing something clandestine, and therefore wrong, settles down heavily upon

her for the first time. But before she comes out into the open space above Willard Foy's cottage on the quay, she has thrown off the impression, and almost persuaded herself that it is "only a harmless joke,"—one about which she will be able to laugh with Lady Marguerite in the pleasant, peaceful days to come.

"After all, there's no *harm*, and not a bit of impropriety in it in reality," the girl pants reassuringly to herself, as she comes up close to the red door of the fantastically painted cottage. "All I have to do is to hold my hand out with this ring, and all I have to say is, 'Give back the letters.' It's nothing bad, even if it is found out; and it never will be found out if the man is as chivalrous as she says he is. Any way, I'm in for it now, and she'll be my friend for life if I carry it through successfully."

As she comes to this conclusion, a

sonorous voiced eight-day clock in the cottage strikes the half-hour past nine, and Lily lifts her hand and taps sharply at the door three times. She is shrouded from head to foot in a long black alpaca cloak, which she has abstracted for the purpose from her mother's wardrobe. The hood is drawn closely round her face, which gleams with almost ghastly fairness in the moonlight.

"It's the voice I can't manage," she says to herself, as with beating heart she stands awaiting a response to her appeal. "*She* says our voices are alike, but hers is thinner and fainter than mine. Never mind! I'll whisper."

There is a sound of movement in the cottage, which is a tiny fantastic toy, kept up by the Lestranges for the convenience of their boating and river-side picnic parties. It is occupied by, and is under the charge of, a man called Willard Foy;

and sometimes, when there is no chance of any of "the family" requiring the rooms, he takes a lodger during the summer months for the sketching, or during the winter for the snipe-shooting season. That the rooms are occupied now by a good-looking young artist is no secret in Garveston. Then why is Lily here?

In another moment the door is opened, and the pathway on which Lily stands is flooded with lamp-light from the rose-coloured chintz-hung room. A man stands in the doorway—a handsome, well-grown young man—the artist who is well known to Garveston, he having been for some weeks past occupied in the task of immortalising the beauties of its woodland and river scenery on canvas.

"My brave Daisy!" he says in delighted tones; "it was like your noble, sweet self to do this—to show your trust and love."

He utters the last word in a low, thrill-

ing tone, and holds his hands out to her.

"Come in, you will be quite safe. I have sent Foy up to the village, and no one comes near the quay at night. Come in, and tell me that your bravery is not going to end here. Give up Lestrange, Daisy! stick to me, the man who has your *heart* as well as your promise."

She glides inside the door, for instinctively she feels that this man is to be trusted, and with bent, averted head, she hands him a ring.

"Now give me the letters," she whispers, "and then let me go, for it will be all over."

She has purposely stood as much in the shade as she can all the while, but when she says this he catches her outstretched hand, and draws her a step or two into the light.

"My altered Daisy," he says sorrow-

fully; "this means that you have done with me altogether, then? Dear, your letters, few and uncompromising as they are, shall be destroyed before you if you will: but keep the ring, Daisy; it will not hurt you, and no one knows who gave it to you."

"But I *was* to give it back," Lily says, in her natural tones, forgetting to whisper; and the man, startled and confused, exclaims, with agitation,—

"What farce is this? What fraud, rather? You are not the — the lady I took you for. You are not—"

"Lady Marguerite. No, I'm not," the girl cries, in remorse and confusion. "I'm Lily Perry; and I came here to you, thinking that I might help her out of a little scrape, and no one, not even you, be ever a bit the wiser for it: but you've found me out, and I begin to think there was more earnest than fun in the affair between

you. Still, let me fulfil my mission, which is to give you back your ring, get back her letters, and give you to understand that she will be married in about a fortnight."

"On my word she has chosen a pleasant ambassador for her unpleasant mission," he said, admiringly. "Well, young lady, you see me in rather a pitiable light—a renounced lover never cuts a very grand figure; but at least you shall be able to say that I am very acquiescent, and that I have given you as little trouble as possible. Here are the only letters I have ever received from her, and as for the ring—"

He pauses, takes the little gold ring, and looks at it half regretfully for a moment. Then he says suddenly,—

"Will you trust me to see your face? If it's as kind as your voice I shall bear the memory of this mortification better."

Blushing, laughing, wishing herself "well out of it," and at the same time half enjoying the risk and the romance, Lily advances, casts off the hood of her cloak, and stands revealed before him in all her beauty.

With a deep sigh of relief he turns presently from his rapt contemplation of her charms, and says,—

"I am not disappointed, but still I am mortified, you know. Will you do away with the keen edge of that mortification?"

"I will, if I can."

"Well said, for you can. Keep the little ring which your friend has rejected, in memory of this night's adventure, and let me get an introduction to your family to-morrow. I will be discretion itself. For *her* sake no one shall ever know how we became acquainted."

"Yes, if you like," Lily says merrily.

Then she shrouds herself in her cloak again, and holds out her firm, beautiful, womanly hand in farewell.

"Good-bye. I must get home now. But before I go, please let me tell you, and please to believe me, that if I had known you to be what you are, I wouldn't have come to-night; I would have told her to come herself, or to trust you."

"But I am glad; and some day or other I may tell you the reason why," he answers. And then, before he can make up his mind as to whether or not he may dare to proffer her his escort, Lily turns and flees away into the shadows of the wood on her homeward path.

She gets back into the orchard at the bottom of the garden without interruption or alarm of any kind; but just as she is quietly fastening the door, and congratulating herself on having carried her extraordinary mission through successfully, she

is startled by Fred Dalton's appearance and voice.

"Lily!" he cries; "all the village is looking for you, and I have been half mad with fright."

Collected, and honest in intention and design as Lily is, secure as she feels in the consciousness of her own integrity of purpose, she trembles a little as he addresses her. But she is quite sufficiently mistress of herself to guard and conceal the precious packet of letters, for the sake of regaining which she has dared this doughty deed.

"I have been for a prowl through the woods, Fred," she says undauntedly. "Why has the village excited itself about me?"

"Would you have let me go with you, or did you want to be alone, Lily?" he asks, in a pleading voice that reassures her.

"You dear boy! *Of course* you might have gone with me!" she says dauntlessly; and she means what she says too, for Fred is one of those loyal young English gentlemen on whom a girl intuitively feels that she may rely to protect her from the consequences of her own as well as anybody else's folly.

Fred is soothed by her ready acquiescence in a scheme which cannot now be carried out; but he is still a little disturbed by the thought of her having been in the woods so late alone.

"Why, I know every inch of the woods—know them as well as I do this garden—and everybody in the place knows me. Why make it a matter of importance that I should go there at any time?"

"Lady Marguerite Haughton has been over for you to-night, Lily. That isn't a thing that happens every day. No wonder—"

"Lady Marguerite been *already!* Then she must repent—" Lily cries out, losing sight of discretion for a moment; and Fred takes the words to heart and treasures them up.

The Perrys' is an easy-going household, and as soon as Lily is safely over the threshold of the door, coolly telling them how sweet it has been in the woods this night, they forget their fright about her. But Mrs Perry cannot forget Lady Marguerite's inexplicable visit; and the servants, who invariably put the worst possible construction upon any incident that is capable of being distorted, speak with bated breath to one another in the house, and with *un*-bated breath out of it, of "Miss Lily's flurried looks, and of the way in which she must have crept out of the house like a thief." They add that they'd "like to know what would be said of any poor servant who went on in any such a way?"

and make such a suppressed sensational uproar about things in general, that Lily gets spoken of as being "flighty and troublesome to them at home," and a great deal too fond of being "out of an evening with that young man of hers, Mr Fred Dalton." Out of this grows a kind of court of inquiry, which goes on sitting on Lily without intermission and without mercy; and the result of this is, that by-and-by, when the squire brings home his bride, Lady Marguerite, the one person in Garveston whom he expresses a desire that she shall not know is the one person to whom she is most deeply indebted—Lily Perry.

More than six weeks have passed since the night when Lily adventured forth for amusement's sake to the cottage on the quay, when Lady Margaret Lestrange appears for the first time in church. This

first appearance in church is a great crucial test, which all—even the greatest of great county ladies — must undergo. How she behaves, what bonnet she wears, and what genuflexions she indulges in; whether she sings the Gregorians as if she liked them, or shows a preference for Anglicans by looking disturbed while Gregorians are being sung; whether she is going to keep up the old, old custom of a few minutes' kindly gossip with all and sundry while her carriage is being fetched up to the lych-gate;—all these, and many another knotty point concerning the way in which the lady of the manor means things to be conducted in the future, are settled on the Sunday on which she makes her first appearance in the village church.

Lady Marguerite wins golden opinions this first Sunday. She is at the eleven o'clock service, to which she has walked

through the woods by the river, resting by the way at Willard Foy's cottage on the quay. She has won the old fisherman's heart by the kindly interest she takes in him and in his lodgings, and she has looked with the greatest interest at some pictures which old Willard's present lodger has painted.

"Ye'll see him at church, my leddy," the old man tells her. "He's dressed un in uns best, and gone up to church this morning; and folks *du* say that it's not for the prayers nor the preaching that he goes, but to get a look at a pretty young lady," Willard Foy explains garrulously to the great squire's greater lady.

"And who is the pretty young lady whom he goes to see?" Lady Marguerite asks; and then she hastens to add, with a laugh that is not at all pretty, and that makes the squire wish "she wouldn't enter into such petty interests—"

"He must make the best of a short time, Foy, for I mean to reserve these rooms for myself entirely. I shall have a picnic here next week; your lodger must be gone by that time."

"It's a good part of my living will go with him," the old man says grumblingly.

"I'll compensate you for whatever you may lose through not letting the rooms," she replies lightly. "Arthur," she continues, "how can you ever have submitted to having such a sweet little casket of a place desecrated in such a way?" Then my lady walks on through the woods, and old Willard Foy goes into the sitting-room of the cottage, which is sacred to the artist, and compares the fair patrician face which he has just been studying, with a face that appears on many a leaf in the artist's sketch-book.

"I thought I knowed her," he says delightedly. "He have met her, and painted

her for his pleasure and not to sell, that's certain; and now she comes round here spying and prying, and saying he must go. I thought I knowed her. I thought I knowed her!"

Meanwhile, while old Willard Foy is thus unceremoniously looking through his lodger's portfolio, and putting this and that together in his mind, Lady Marguerite has walked through the woods and into the church.

She is prepared for the sight, she has nerved herself to bear it, but still she winces and her fine nostrils quiver when it meets her eyes. There, in a pew a few paces only from her own exalted one, she sees standing the girl who resembles her, but who is much more beautiful than she is—the girl who went out and bravely and successfully executed a desperate mission for her. And standing by this girl's side is the splendidly handsome, gallant-

looking man who won her—Lady Marguerite—to think that she could find bliss and content in his love and obscurity! "The glamour only lasted a few weeks, and then I knew that love wasn't enough, and that Lestrange would make me infinitely happier than ever Harold Lomax would have done," she thinks, as she slowly draws off her long gloves and prepares to kneel devoutly. But still, though Lomax is "over" and done with, and Lestrange (her rightful lord, the man who represents honours such as those "unto which she has been born" being assured to her) is by her side, Lady Marguerite does feel a jealous, unsatisfied qualm, as she thinks of and contrasts then and now, and looks at Lily by the artist's side.

"So nice and unassuming of Lady Marguerite!" they say one to another when they assemble outside the church door presently. "She walked here like any

one of us, and paid such attention to the service!"

"And didn't show a bit of annoyance, though Mr Slade hadn't given her a few minutes' grace, but began the service sharp to the minute," another remarks.

"I should quite like to ask Lady Marguerite to stay and have some luncheon with us," Mrs Perry says, joining the group. "She and Lily were such great friends when they met at our dear Mrs Lestrange's one afternoon, you know."

"Oh, if I were you," Mrs Dalton puts in sharply, "I wouldn't be the one to remind Lady Marguerite of *that.* We all know what those sudden little fancies which great ladies take, mean!—they're on with you one day and off with you the next. But Lady Marguerite will be soberer now; and if her soberer judgment endorses her girlish fancy for your Lily, why then I'd talk of the 'friendship' between them, but not till then."

Mrs Dalton is sore about her son Fred, who is throwing away what she very naturally regards as a very worthy love on a very unworthy object. "A girl who sets a strolling painter up above *my* boy isn't deserving that he should think of her, or that we any of us should have patience with her," Mrs Dalton says whenever the subject crops up in these days. Accordingly, very few people have patience with poor Lily.

But the law of compensation works. Lily is so supremely and genuinely happy in the society of the man who is teaching her colour, poetry, love, and, indeed, every form of beauty in a few easy lessons, that she is quite indifferent to the Garveston mind, and the Garveston manner of expressing the same. Harold Lomax—the man to whom she went under false pretences to serve a false acquaintance—the man whom she first saw as another woman's lover

"left lamenting"—is her master, in fact; and in the joy she feels in acknowledging him as such, she finds forgetfulness of every kind of past and present disagreeable.

Lady Marguerite is the centre of an adoring multitude when Lily and Mr Lomax come out into the churchyard presently. To Lily the great young lady gives her hand in all friendly patronage, but her sweet, innocent, rather insipid blue eyes look right through Mr Lomax as if they had never seen him before. And he is quite contented that it should be so, for Lily is his only joy at present, and he condemns himself rather severely for that folly in the past which made him love something that lacked her perfection.

Apparently Lady Marguerite has a very sweet nature, for as she picks her dainty way home, presently she says to her husband,—"Arthur, it is evident to me that that handsome young stranger—the artist

from Foy's cottage—is an aspirant for the Garveston beauty's hand. You *must* let me see her and hear all about it. Probably it's on his account that the little scandal which you tell me of has arisen. You know the village mind can't bear talent that it doesn't understand, or anything foreign to it altogether."

"You must do as you like, Marguerite," Mr Lestrange says indifferently—for now that Marguerite is *his wife*, he deems it impossible that anything tainted can come in contact with her without instantly withering up.

"Then I shall certainly 'like' to see a little of Lily Perry," Lady Marguerite says royally; and she privately resolves, if Lily Perry is poaching on her old preserves, that Lily Perry shall be taught that it is only noble sportswomen who may go after the big game.

In pursuance of this plan, Lady Mar-

guerite calls on the Perrys in a day or two, and is shown into a room in which Lily, looking like a sun-tinted flower, is singing at the piano.

The two girls face each other in silence for a moment and then Lady Marguerite, says,—

"I owe you a debt of gratitude for what you have done, at least; and so, against Mr Lestrange's wish, I have come to see you, and to ask if you still wish that we should be the friends we agreed to be when I—when you agreed to help me?"

She speaks in dry, measured tones; there is nothing spontaneous about this renewal of her offer of friendship. It is rather as if she were paying a distasteful debt that she speaks.

"Oh, Lady Marguerite, pray never refer to that very trifling service again," Lily says, with a blushing face and kindling

eyes, for Lily has her own reasons for finding any reminiscence of the relations that may have existed between Harold Lomax and another woman than herself disagreeable. "*Pray* never refer to it again; it is buried and forgotten; and if" —and now her voice grows haughty— "you offer to renew your acquaintance with me against Mr Lestrange's wish, perhaps I should relieve you of a difficulty if I declined your offer."

"I shall please myself in the selection of my lady friends, and I wish you to be one of them," Lady Marguerite says, with a sweetness that has something unreal about it, Lily feels. Then in a moment the girl understands that Lady Marguerite is jealous still of the old love whom she renounced and jilted.

"And I'm so proud of him. I'll show her I'm prouder of loving him than of her proffered friendship," Lily thinks, the spirit of young womanly defiance to every-

thing and every one that is in the slightest degree antagonistic to the development of her love rampant in her at a moment's notice.

"If we get to be friendly naturally, without any effort and without your having to remind yourself that I once helped you in a *very* trifling matter, why then it will be pleasant," Lily says dubiously; and Lady Marguerite retorts,—

"Ah, you're absorbed by some deeper interest than mere friendly intercourse could ever supply to you. Who is he, Lily? Is it any one I know? Come, tell me. You were singing when I came in. Was it one of *his* songs? Your happy blush tells me, that it was. Sing it to me, will you?"

She speaks excitedly, and her hand trembles as she opens the song at the first page, and Lily's jealous eyes devour every sign of emotion.

"Perhaps he taught the song to *her*. It may have suited their case as well as it does ours," the girl tells herself, as with faltering voice she sings the following words:—

"If you want courage to disguise
The censure of the grave,
Though Love's a tyrant in your eyes,
Your heart is but a slave.

My love is full of noble pride,
Nor can it e'er submit
To let that fop Discretion ride
In triumph over it.

False friends I have as well as you,
Who daily counsel me
Fame and Ambition to pursue,
And leave off loving thee.

But when the least regard I show
To fools who thus advise,
May I be dull enough to grow
Most miserably wise."

"Has he—this lover whom you won't reveal to me—made you believe that he

had you in his thoughts when he wrote that?" Lady Marguerite asks, as the song ends.

"Oh dear, no! He never attempted to trade on my ignorance in such a way. He read me the words, and I liked them so much that he got a friend of his to set them to music. None of the glory of the composition belongs to him."

"But he has told you, probably, that they seem to fit your case? Men say such things very glibly when they are in pursuit," Lady Marguerite laughs, with an air of anything but genuine light-heartedness.

"This special man has certainly not told me anything of the sort; and I don't know whether he's in pursuit of anybody or not," Lily says resolutely; but her words come with nervous haste, and her eyes sparkle with the real love-light.

"Why do you try to deceive me about such a trifle as Harold Lomax's love?" Lady Marguerite asks. "Lily, do be sensible enough to remember that I voluntarily resigned that gentleman—that it was *I* who broke the very slight chain that linked us together. Your own reason ought to tell you that I can't be jealous of *you;* therefore, why don't you confide in me, and confess that this man is now your lover?"

She speaks so tolerantly, so impartially, so very much as if she has no care nor consideration for any one save Lily in the case, that Lily is disturbed and bewildered. If she had anything definite to declare, she would be in a far better position; but as it is, she feels goaded and humiliated, and very much as if she had proclaimed her love for a man who has never sought it.

"I have no more right to speak of Mr Harold Lomax as my present lover

than you have to speak of him as your late one so contemptuously, Lady Marguerite," the girl says, angrily. "He comes to our house as a friend. It is not generous of you to try and depreciate him because you have thrown him away."

Lily knows that her anger, or at least the exhibition of it, is ill advised. She feels that she is giving cool, perfectly self-contained Lady Marguerite an advantage which that lady will not hesitate to use against her with Mr Lomax for all her offers of friendship. But Lily is in an abnormal condition, and cannot, therefore, be as discreetly cautious as she ought to be; and in her desire to show forth the worthiness of the man she loves, she rashly exposes herself to danger.

"He is much nobler than you are about it; he has never once, *even to me*, hinted a disparaging thing about you, though you must have served him badly by your

own showing," she says, putting the song which had raised the discussion out of sight.

"Hasn't he, indeed, *not even to you!*" Lady Marguerite says mockingly. "My dear Lily, your words show the enormous amount of trusting confidence you're reposing in him, and as I know him well, they strike me as very funny. Of *course* he'd not say anything that might be calculated to annoy me! He's a man of the world, Lily, and is staying down here hoping to renew the flirtation with me. His experience of married women has been large, and not good, and—he does not know yet that I am very different from others."

"Lily," Laura Dalton cries, bursting unceremoniously into the room at this juncture, "Fred has heard such news from some of the —th men: they say your artist friend, Mr Lomax, has passed under other names at other places; that, in fact, he's an adventurer, if not an impostor!"

CHAPTER III.

HAVING lost him, or rather "thrown him away" herself, Lady Marguerite is, it must be confessed, not at all displeased at hearing that the man who has sought consolation from another feminine source for her loss is under the ban of suspicion.

There is a vulgar alacrity in the way in which Laura Dalton volubly enlarges on the possibilities of the case, that would be offensive to Lady Marguerite under other circumstances. But as it is, since she must have done with him altogether, it is not displeasing to her that he should be hunted down by the local tongue in the local mind.

It is in vain that loyal Lily strives to defend him; she can only do it by halves, for her heart is counsel, not her reason. She does not dare to directly appeal to Lady Marguerite to say a word for the absent, maligned man, for to appeal to Lady Marguerite would be to implicate her, and Lily is loyal in every direction.

"I'm surprised at you for repeating such things, Laura, and I'm disgusted with Fred for propagating such a report in the place. You know papa *hates* scandal, and won't have any of it brought here," Lily says, trying to speak as if she were regarding things from an abstract point of view, and not at all as if she were indirectly concerned in the issue.

"But it may not be scandal — it's probably the truth, Lily. I'm sure the way Mr Lomax stays on at the cottage on the quay looks as if he were not quite what he says he is. *We* have never

had anything to do with him, you know, so it doesn't affect us; mamma is always so very careful about strangers," Laura Dalton says, with an air of deferential explanation to Lady Marguerite.

"Your mamma is quite right; but probably this is all a tempest in a tea-cup," Lady Marguerite says languidly, rising to take her departure. "Tell me if you hear anything more about it, Lily. I can't have any of our people letting lodgings to wandering artists, and entertaining impostors unawares! You see Mr Lestrange intends to have a model estate and tenantry, and model schools and model poor."

"You will be a splendid aid to Mr Lestrange in carrying out such an intention," Lily says, with hardly suppressed bitterness; and Lady Marguerite, secure in her marriage and in the loyalty of her old lover and her new friend, smiles her cruelly superior smile and goes away.

"What a *sweet* woman, to be sure," Laura says admiringly. "There's always something that marks the real aristocrat. How she tried to seem to take an interest in that insignificant Mr Lomax just because he's interesting to us. I wish she had taken a fancy to me instead of to you, Lily; I could have adored a woman like that."

"I wish with all my heart she had," Lily says quickly; and then Laura asks "Why?" with an expression of astonishment at the ingratitude which makes Lily regret that she has ever known any one of these people—Lady Marguerite, Lomax, and even Laura, her old Garveston friend.

"Lily, it isn't true that this Mr Lomax and you are secretly engaged, is it?" Laura says presently, as she seats herself at the piano and tumbles over Lily's music. "This song is written out by him, isn't it? Are they his words? Is it pretty? Do you

sing it? I didn't know he composed! May I take it home and try it?"

"Yes; you've asked so many things, I can only say 'Yes' to all," harassed Lily rejoins. "You might take the song, and welcome; but I know how it will be if you do. Fred will come in while you are trying it, and he and you will begin about Mr Lomax and my folly in fancying that he — exists! for really I don't obtrude any other fancy of mine about him upon you; and you'll show the song all over Garveston, and make up a story about it and us."

"Really, Lily, your cranky about Mr Lomax," Laura says, rising, and throwing the song down with ill-tempered dignity. "Identifying yourself with him in such a way, and taking up arms in his defence, because Fred very naturally comes home and tells us that he has heard that a man in our midst is an impostor! I'd

like to put him on his honour, and ask him if he is Harold Lomax the artist, or not."

"And so I will," Lily cries out. "Not that I have any right to do it in the way you think, Laura, for he has neither asked me to marry him nor to run away with him; but I *do* like him, and if any words of mine can put him straight with people who suspect him, he *shall* be put straight; and it's shameful of us to speak of him in this way when he is so infinitely above us."

"Above us! because he pretends to paint, and affects to like to do so in the shade!" Laura sneers. "Poor Lily! Can't you see that he's here because he can't be a prominent figure in more public places?"

"That's Fred's speech, not yours."

"Yes, that's what Fred says; and he's a man, and knows the world better than

we do. Lily, don't you know yourself that you've altered to us all since you've known him, and that can't be right? If he were a gentleman, he wouldn't lurk about and make love to you in a way no one can take hold of against him! The truth is, Lily, and you know it, he's keeping his own paltry little place in the world safe, and he's making yours shaky! and I for one am glad, as your friend and Fred's sister, that Fred is on the track to find out who your Mr Harold Lomax is."

Laura goes away home soon after this, and Lily hopes "that she has heard the last of it"—the "last" of censure and rebuke on his account, that is, not by any means the last of Harold Lomax.

But at dinner that day, her father, who is a great walker, and a great collector of intelligence, veracious and the reverse, says,—

"I walked round by Garveston Quay this morning. The squire is improving that bit, to be sure. They're felling trees in the wood in front of Foy's cottage to make the lawn bigger than it is. My lady has taken a fancy to the place, and means to have it for her toy afternoon tea-shop, they say."

"Then Foy will have to get rid of his lodger?" Mrs Perry says with some interest, for she is Lily's mother, and that Foy's lodger should remain a little longer, at least until his intentions become clear, is not an un-maternal aspiration on her part.

"Yes, the young painter has had notice to pack up his paint-pots and be off," Mr Perry says, oblivious, in his earnest endeavours to carve a goose correctly, of the look of agony which crosses his daughter Lily's face as he speaks. "He's had notice to pack up his paint-

pots and be off," Mr Perry repeats triumphantly, as he neatly divides a joint; "and he's noways unwilling to go, I should think, for it's been dull enough for him here; but he tells me he has painted the best picture he ever has done or will do during his stay."

"Have you seen him to-day, father?" Lily forces herself to ask.

"Yes, my dear; seen him and had a smoke and a talk with him," Mr Perry answers cheerily — for he is not Lily's mother, and he does not see how the girl flushes and pales at every word that is uttered relative to this stranger; "and he's going to look in to-night to say good-bye, so mind you have a decent supper, missus, and I'll give him a glass of good whisky-toddy."

"I'm sorry he's going, for he seems a very nice, quiet, hard-working young man; and it made quite a change for

the girls his looking in of an evening, and I'll take care there's a nice little supper to-night," Mrs Perry says, collectively regarding the carcase of the goose critically the while with an eye to the hash she may make of it by-and-by.

"Even *mother* doesn't seem to understand that he's something more than a guest who's to be made welcome to the poor little best we have," Lily thinks bitterly, as she pictures the abomination of desolation which will be her portion when Harold Lomax goes and Garveston knows him no longer.

For he has made each solitude a sacred haunt, and the song of every bird a psalm of joy to her, during the bright brief days of the late summer. And now she hears that he is going, and she cannot even tell those who will scoff at him who he is.

It is eight o'clock, and two men are in the middle of a very well arranged and admirably cooked dinner at Foy's Cottage. The one is the gentleman about whom doubts have arisen in Garveston's mind, and terrible love qualms in Lily Perry's heart. The other is a small-bodied, large-headed young man, with long hair, feminine softness in the tones of his voice, and an Israelitish physique generally.

He looks young, boyish — girlish almost; but already he has marked an epoch in English art, and set his mark upon the time. Nevertheless, clever colourist, æsthetic artist, marvellous conceptional brilliant success that he is, there is something about him from which women shrink most when he most openly adores them.

"But, then, if I don't openly adore, their modesty makes them pass me over altogether, for fear they should seem to seek me because I am so to be sought,"

he says unctuously, in explanation of his openly offered adoration. And when he says this, Harold Lomax (to whom the talented Jewish gentleman is also nauseating at times) replies,—

"My dear fellow, if I were like you I'd be contented to be passed over altogether by women, for I should be certain that I should never please them if they began to investigate me. You're a charming fellow, Simeon, full of wit and fancy; but women don't care for wit and fancy unless they're made up in a pretty parcel that they can unpack at their own will and hang out at their own pleasure in the light that suits them. Now, you're not a pretty parcel, Simeon; and though I like you very much, I think the women are right who have nothing to do with you."

Harold Lomax says this with the more strength and bitterness since he happens

to know that in days of yore the talented, prosperous, plethorically rich Jew had the temerity to offer his stubby hand and well-oiled prospects, together with his name—Samuel Simeon Samuel—to the Lady Marguerite Haughton. Further—and this additional knowledge is the galling thing—the Lady Marguerite *hesitated* in her own mind considerably as to whether or not she should accept this offer.

That Mr Samuel has not forgotten either of these facts is evident from his next remark,—

"I suppose Lady Marguerite took your advice—eh?—when she made up her mind to have nothing to do with me, after considerable uncertainty—mind you, *considerable* uncertainty," Mr Simeon Samuel says, in response to his host's last remark. And the man who is known as Harold Lomax in Garveston replies,—

"Lady Marguerite never condescended

to ask my advice on any subject. If I had presumed to offer her any, it would have been that she should marry myself. But it was always with me in regard to her a case of 'Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall.' Simeon, we must not mention that lady's name any more; she's a married woman, and the lady of the land, and, Heaven bless her! here's her health."

He lifts a glass of foaming wine to his lips as he speaks, and in sheer amazement Mr Samuel follows his example.

"Here's her health, and all that you say," the latter gentleman says, presently. "But I don't forget that I could have given her finer diamonds than Lestrange can ever hope to get hold of, and that at one time she was very well inclined to wear them."

"Faugh! Don't boast about civilities you wrested from her when her father owed you money," Lomax says im-

patiently; and Mr Simeon Samuel almost curls himself round his own knees in his intense enjoyment of the joke of Lady Marguerite being a cause of contention between them.

"She despised my diamonds and your poverty," he says, smilingly, "and we can both afford to forgive her; for I've found a finer girl, who can wear all I give her well, and you have taken a fancy to play the part of Lord Burleigh to the pretty Miss Perry. It's a mistake of yours—a stupidly chivalrous mistake."

"I may think that you're making a mistake about the wearer of the diamonds," Lomax says impatiently, as he sees that Simeon is drawing a clever portrait of Lily Perry with his thumb-nail on the tablecloth.

"I can get rid of her and reclaim my diamonds at any moment," Mr Samuel laughs; "and I can go away, and say how

foolish she is, and bid other men beware of her if she annoys me. Oh, I'll hit back at a woman if she ever hits out at me! I keep her letters, and shall show just as much of their contents as I choose if we quarrel. But as for you, what hold have *you* got over the girl you're in love with? If she married another man to-morrow, you couldn't disgrace her. Now could you?"

The young Israelitish gentleman is so much in earnest that he pushes his chair back from the table, and stoops forward to look into Lomax's face as he asks his question. But Lomax starts up from his chair and turns away to the window that looks out over the river, without answering.

"I should do a good work for myself and other people if I threw that little brute over the quay, and made an end of him and his suggestions to-night," Lomax says to himself moodily. But he does not commit Mr Samuel to the care of the

cold river, and the suggestions will revive themselves in his memory now and again during the long watches of the night.

Late that night, when his guest is sleeping in the inner chamber of that cottage on the quay, Lomax takes out and re-reads a note he has received in the course of the day. It is very brief, for it has been written in haste and sent in fear, but never for one moment does he doubt that it has been dictated by love:—

"People are saying horribly unkind things of you. Give me the right to refute them.—Yours, LILY."

This is all she has written with pen and ink, but the man who holds it in his hand, fresh from the influence of the Jew, knows that it may be read in one or two ways, and that more may be made of it than Lily has ever imagined.

"I'll never be tempted to show that the dear little girl takes a genuine interest in me till I can show all the world that I take a genuine interest in her," he says to himself; and he tears the note into a few pieces and throws them out of the window, and into the river, he hopes. But the hope is fallacious. The light wind catches the bits of paper, and wafts them into a cranny by the door of the boathouse, where they are seen the next morning by a young lady who is on a fern-gathering expedition.

How carefully the lady who is on ferns intent fits the poor, innocent bits of paper together, till they can be read right off in all their normal guiltiness, may be imagined when it is told that the lady is none other than Lady Marguerite. But language fails to convey any adequate idea of the alacrity with which she forthwith jumps to a wrong conclusion.

"The bold-faced girl is asking him to marry her outright; there's no circumlocution in the manner of doing so, I must say," the young queen of the county says to herself, as she glances over poor Lily's words. "She asks him outright to give her the right to refute the evil things that sensible people say of him. Well, Miss Lily Perry, supposing I help you to rush upon your fate; supposing I pave the way to the point at which he and you may make such fools of yourselves that you'll hate one another for the remainder of your lives; supposing—"

She ceases abruptly from her suppositions, for before her she sees Mr Simeon Samuel engaged in the honourable work of studying the effect of a fungus on the gnarled root of a tree. By-and-by he will paint Mariana in her moated grange handling some such fungus as this, with frogs and toads about her feet, and an atmosphere of vegetable

impurity about her. And the critics will rave of his realism, and canonise him for the exquisite fidelity with which he reproduces most of the nasty things he sees in nature.

She is so unfeignedly surprised at the sight of him that she lets her bits of paper flutter away, and he servilely gathers them together again, and (reading them first) gives them back to her. And she plays the lady of the land to him, and is gratified that he should have come into her district to make sketches, and invites him to her house, and offers to introduce him to her husband, and only discovers when she does this that he is already the guest of the tenant of Foy's Cottage.

"I am staying with Harold Lomax," he says. "Perhaps you may never have heard of him; but he can paint and make love equally well, and just now he is painting and making love in this neighbourhood."

Mr Simeon Samuel quite relishes the way in which he has turned this sentence to his friend's detriment, for the cup that Harold's mere presence holds to his (Samuel's) lips when women are by, is a bitter one.

"Oh, indeed!" she says, with such indifferent scorn that she can scarcely believe it of herself that she has ever loved the man of whom she speaks. "Oh, indeed! these itinerant artists generally marry models or dairymaids; is it one of the latter who has enchained your friend?"

"No; it's a pretty young lady — the beauty of the village—Miss Lily Perry. But you must remember Lomax, Lady Marguerite? In the days when I had the honour of visiting at your house in Portland Place, I also frequented the Row, you know; and several times when you preferred the quiet road to Richmond to the fashionable ride, I happened to follow you, and see Mr Lomax join you. Oh, yes,

they were very pleasant days, those! and in the evenings, in society, you were very kind to me, and we talked of diamonds. You remember it all, I see."

Mr Samuel's tones are fulsomely fawning, but a triumphant sparkle lurks in his eyes, and in some undefined way Lady Marguerite feels that she is in his power.

"Yet what harm can the ignominious little wretch do me?" she asks herself; and she strives to remember if ever she wrote him a letter, or if ever she could have been in any situation with Harold Lomax which it would peril her fair fame to have recalled by this man should he know of it. "At least he may make things uncomfortable between Arthur and me if he's vengeful," she tells herself. "I had better please him than cross him—reptile that he is!"

So she smoothes her brow and her tones, and repeats her invitation for him to dine with them that night; and it is

only her eyes that tell him how she dislikes and fears him.

When the host and guest (who are not friends in reality, but who have had a habit of drifting together pretty constantly in their artistic careers) meet at luncheon this day, Mr Simeon Samuel immediately moots the subject which is uppermost in his mind.

"I met our old friend Lady Marguerite in the wood just now, and she asked me to dine with them to-night," he says, with an overdone air of indifference to the honour under which he is visibly swelling, that exasperates Lomax.

"You're not going, are you?" the latter asks quickly.

"Not going!—well, I hardly know. Probably the fellow she has married is a mere bucolic; but as there's nothing better to do, I think I shall go. You'll excuse my leaving you for such a fair cause, I'm sure."

"I am going to dine with the Lestranges myself, so you'll not leave me—unfortunately," Lomax replies.

"Have you seen her too? Have you been meeting her?" Samuel asks, with a slimy smile.

"No, I haven't; but I've met her husband, and he gave me such a pressing invitation, that I had no excuse for refusing it. He seems a splendid fellow. Bucolic, indeed! My good Simeon, neither one of us can hold a candle to Lestrange."

"Generous defeated rival!" Samuel sneers. "Does this excellent gentleman know of the former friendship between you and that iced pink of perfection, his wife? I should hint at it if I were in your place — hint at it in a way that would cow her without compromising her. I should—"

"Don't try to make me believe you would do anything so dastardly," Lomax

says impatiently; "if you do, I'll kick you out of my house, and advise every honest man I know to kick you out of his."

"You are so fond of your joke," Samuel says, crawlingly; "so fond of your joke. But you'd think a good deal, my good Lomax, before you kicked me; and when you had thought, you wouldn't do it—no, nor would you advise your friends to do it either. I'm not a man of war, but those who spit upon my Jewish gaberdine are sorry for it always!"

"I believe you'd hit a fellow hard who ever hurt you, Simeon, but you'd hit him in the back." Lomax laughs; and Simeon Samuel hastens to assert that he "will never hit his dear friend Harold Lomax anywhere, but that nevertheless he (Simeon) is not to be scurvily treated with impunity;" and as he says this, a scheme of revenge for those idle taunting words of

Lomax's forms itself in Mr Samuel's mind, which if carried out will mar the brightness of Lomax's life for many years to come.

The dinner at Garveston Hall is a very pleasant one this night. Both the artists are in their best moods, and the stream of conversation flows on with unbroken brightness and clearness till a late hour. Lady Marguerite is in her best mood too, for she feels intuitively that the secret between herself and Lomax, in which there is no shame, will always be held sacred by him; and as for Simeon Samuel's knowledge of the past affair, she treats it with contempt. But for all her security, she contrives to offer little flattering verbal sops to both men, and pleases Lomax more than she has ever pleased him before by praising Lily Perry.

When the guests are gone, Mr Lestrange stands by the mantelpiece ruminating for

a few moments. At the expiration of them, he says, with a sudden clearing up of his perplexed expression,—

"The whole evening that young fellow Lomax's face has been puzzling me, Daisy. I could have sworn when I saw him in church on Sunday that I'd known him before. Now I have it: he went up to Trinity the term I left—in fact, he waxed as I waned—he's Lord Lethringham."

"Are you sure, Arthur?" Lady Marguerite says piteously—for the Earl of Lethringham is one of the richest peers in England, and the title is one of the oldest in the peerage. "Can she indeed be so miserable a woman? Can she have executed such a vast mistake as to have thrown away this brilliant chance?"

"I'm sure," Lestrange rejoins, with an air of conviction, "he's masquerading for some purpose — a love affair, probably; I'll go to him to-morrow, tax him with

being Lethringham, and ask him to trust me."

"I think I'll go to my room," Lady Marguerite says falteringly. "These men's dinner-parties always tire me."

She goes into her room, gets rid of her maid, fastens the door, and sits down to think.

"I have thrown away the highest prize, and put that girl who is like me in the way of gaining it; but she *shall* not be a countess—she shall not profit by my terrible misfortune!"

Thus as a "terrible misfortune" the young wife of two months' standing speaks of her marriage.

CHAPTER IV.

"MR LOMAX is in the drawing-room, Lily; will you go to him?"

"Yes, if you're not ready, mother," Lily replies with assumed carelessness, as she ceases from her occupation of picking off the dead leaves, watering, and generally tending and refreshing the flowers which stand on the low, wide, old-fashioned dining-room window-sill.

It happens to be the morning which, from the first week of her marriage, Mrs Perry has conscientiously devoted to that "family mending" which insists upon being duly and religiously observed, if

domestic decency is to be maintained in middle-class life. There are two or three very interesting "weak places" in some of her best table cloths, which require a great deal of study, and a few strengthening threads. There are also some unmistakable holes of the deadly uninteresting order, upon which no imaginatively delicate tracery of darning may be brought to bear with any effect. In fact, the family linen will give her ample occupation this morning, and so she has a fair excuse for deputing the task of receiving the guest to her unemployed daughter Lily.

Lily goes forth to the performance of the task with flushing face and faltering feet. She has received no answer to that little note which we have seen him perusing, and her soul is in arms at the thought that perhaps he despises her for having written it. "Perhaps he has been amusing himself

only, and thinks to take a country heart and break it ere he goes to town," the girl thinks indignantly; and so, during that short walk from the dining-room across the hall to the presence of the guest, she comes to the foolish resolution of "showing the man who is dearer to her than her life, that if it has all been gay fooling on his part, so also has it been on hers."

He has come this morning with the determination of throwing off all disguise, and of asking her plainly, in language that shall not admit of any double meaning, to be his wife. He has declared to himself that he has tested her sufficiently, and that he needs no further assurance of her loving him for his own sake! He has pictured with loving pride the sweet grace and the worthy way in which she will fill the proud place he will put her in. Yet as soon as she comes into the room, and greets him with enforced formality, he lets go all his

beliefs and intentions, and feels doubtful of and annoyed with her.

"Such a cold little 'Good morning!'" he says reproachfully. "I expected to be met in a more friendly spirit after receiving your dear little note."

"Which I repented myself of writing the instant after I sent it, Mr Lomax; it is so foolish, so intensely 'countrified,' to take an interest in a mere passing acquaintance."

"Very foolish indeed! I'm realising all the folly of it," he says bitterly—for Lily is too obviously on guard for him to feel satisfied with or sure of her. ("She has heard that I'm a cad of an impostor, and she's afraid of compromising herself; women are all alike," he says to himself. And she meanwhile is thinking, "He despises me for having taken his seeming for reality. Well, he shall have nothing further to boast of.")

"We won't say anything more about my

ill-judged, inquisitive little note, if you please, Mr Lomax," she says presently; "the village mind must have been very strongly upon me when I wrote it."

"Don't you care to hear anything more about me?" he asks.

"No, indeed I don't," she says, with an unreal laugh; "but tell me a little about your friend, Mr Samuel. I *am* interested in him, for his was the picture in last year's Academy to my mind."

"What shall I tell you about him?" Lomax says drily. "You know all that is important and interesting—to women. He's enormously rich, he's famous in his art, he has a house on Campden Hill that looks as if it had come straight out of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, and he admires you immensely. What more can you want to know?"

"Nothing, since you don't seem inclined to tell me," she says absently, for her

thoughts are not given to the subjects, but to the speaker.

"Then with your permission I'll change the topic to one in which you will take even less interest, I fear. I am going away."

"Oh, indeed!"

"And I suppose that I may not flatter myself that the information gives you either pleasure or pain?"

"No, indeed!"

"You *are* frank, Miss Perry," he says, starting up indignantly—for Lily, in whose heart a tempest of love and disappointment is raging, has so effectually hid her feeling, that he is deceived into the belief that she is absolutely cold and heartless.

"Am I frank?—you mean that I am indiscreet, I suppose?" she says, blushing angrily at the recollection of the note she has written to him, and her speech annoys him still more deeply, and renders him

still more cruelly unjust to her; for in his pride and perversity he fancies that she is wronging him by doubting him, and by imagining that he can be base enough to misconstrue the pure motive which induced her to write. And so, as there is a mistake, the woman, as usual, suffers for it.

"No; I should not presume to doubt your discretion. You're a wonderfully cautious girl: if you gave a stray dog a bone, with one hand, with the other you would point out to him the path by which he was to depart."

"If you've come to say good-bye, I'll go and call mamma," Lily says, choking back her tears. Then she goes and fetches her mother, and the opportunity for which he has pined and Lily has prayed is lost to them.

"I am very sorry that we are going to lose you, Mr Lomax," Mrs Perry says,

in conventional tones, when she has been in the room two minutes. She does not wish to turn him out, but as he is going "without speaking to either Lily or Lily's papa," perhaps the sooner he goes the better. Moreover, she is anxious to get back to the darning. So she says,—

"I would ask you to stay and take some luncheon with us, Mr Lomax, but the truth is, Mr Perry is out, and Lily and I are going to drive into Plymouth marketing this afternoon, and it wouldn't be worth while keeping you here for that short time."

"No, indeed," he says; "you're very kind. My visit has already exceeded the limits of a morning call."

He rises, and Mrs Perry follows his example with alacrity, and holds out her hand in farewell. Then Lily's slim fingers rest in his for a moment, and with a flushing look at the girl, which lights the

torch of hope afresh in her heart for a moment, he is gone.

"Now, just come and help me with the linen, Lily," Mrs Perry says actively. "He's a pleasant young man that, but I'm almost glad he's gone; your father doesn't like strangers about the house too much."

"Yes; I'm glad he's gone," Lily assents with a gasp.

"It was quite too much of it, the way he had of dropping in here constantly; it doesn't do where there are girls, and yet how can one stop it without seeming to make it of too much importance? Why, child, how you're trembling!"

"Yes, mother, I've just got a woeful prick; the needle slipped under my nail. Ah, ah!" (impatiently), "I can't work any more. I'll go and get Laura to go down by the river with me."

So she goes and secures Laura's company in this her first visit, after Harold Lomax

has left her, to the spot on which he has made his love manifest to her: for about Miss Lily there is no maudlin sentimentality; she is resolved upon abstaining from the luxury of making these haunts sacred and private.

Through all the following week she keeps up with the proud resolve which this kind of trial is sure to develop in a proud woman's breast. Many a chance allusion nearly breaks her down, and many a kindly word nearly overpowers her. But she is strong and young and generous, and she will neither be broken down nor overpowered before those who would most truly grieve to see her so.

It is a fact that Harold Lomax has been very tender, and has made himself inexpressibly dear to her. The remembrance of this tenderness will come upon her at times, overpowering her; but this is always when she is alone. It is only

when no one is by that she blushes and turns pale in quick succession at the remembrance of how warmly he has seemed to love, and how well he has deceived her.

As for him, he has gone away believing her to be a shallow-hearted, mercenary-minded, commonplace flirt. And he is strengthened and supported in his view of the case by a few words from his friend Samuel.

"The unsophisticated country lasses are very much like their astute town sisters, after all," he laughs, one day. "If I hadn't been known as a wealthy man, I don't fancy your pretty little friend, Miss Lily Perry, would have taken so much trouble to get me introduced to her as she has taken. It isn't all rapturous love of art, I'm sure."

"What do you mean?" Lomax asks sullenly.

"Never mind what I mean, my friend; that remains to be seen. The young lady is very pretty, quite pretty enough to found a new school of beauty, and I mean that my wife shall do that when I marry; but meantime I am going to the Perry mansion to afternoon tea with Lady Marguerite."

"Go and be—happy!" Lomax shouts out, with ill-feigned hilarity. "I'm out of it all, I'm glad to say—safely out of it."

He goes up to town by an afternoon train; and Mr Samuel stays behind, and goes to afternoon tea, and makes the most of Lomax's self-congratulations about being well out of it before the whole Perry family, and in her mortified soul Lily believes herself to be a woman scorned.

Her case is not an uncommon one. There has been either miserable misapprehension of his meaning on her part, or foul trickery on his, and she cannot bear

that comment should be made on either possibility. So she suffers in silence, and will not permit her appetite to flag—in which last resolve there is the truest heroism, it being an awful thing to eat when one is ill in mind, and an equally awful thing for those who dwell in the tents with one to witness the daily increasing disinclination to do so.

So for a while Lily eats and drinks and is merry, and is to all outward seeming the same Lily she has been before this stranger came and saw and loved her. But her father's frequent assertion that she is like a "young bear, in that all her troubles are before her," grates harshly on her ears now. She knows that a something is gone from her mind which can never come back to it—a blot made on the fair surface of her life which no after-happiness can ever eradicate.

She does not set herself to the task of

solving the problem of his enforced semi-declaration and sudden exit from the scene. There is "something" which has prevented that consummation which he has taught her to desire, but what that "something" is she will not try to guess, and may never be suffered to know.

Even if she could fathom the mystery, the result would be just the same; the cause in comparison is of little worth. It is a sharp, deep cut that she has received, but she resolutely covers it up, and will not let the air of observation affect it and cause it to fester. Sharp and deep as it is, it is a healthy wound; for her love has been honest and pure, and she hopes that it may heal in time and leave no pain, even though a scar remains.

While the wound is young, and before the efficacy of her mode of treatment can be said to be an ascertained thing, she is surprised by an invitation from Lady

Marguerite—surprised, and flattered, and puzzled, for the invitation is not to Garveston Hall, but to accompany her ladyship to London for a few early winter weeks. And with a weak, wild hope in her heart that in London she may see *him* again, Lily accepts the invitation and goes.

Lady Marguerite is not in one of her best moods at all this day, as she travels up to town. Undue pressure has been put upon her in order to induce her to pay this visit to London just now, and to secure the Garveston Lily as her companion.

"I want to see more of that girl in London, and shall be better able to judge whether she will do for me or not," Mr Samuel says coarsely. "So you must bring her up, and manage that I see her a good deal in society, and you must not let Harold Lomax come near her."

"I hate London at this time of year,"

Lady Marguerite says pettishly. "And Mr Lestrange hates it more than I do; and we have no town house, and he won't hear of an hotel for me, and nothing shall induce me to go into lodgings."

"But you have an aunt in Kensington—the Lady Elinor Worthington—who much admires my pictures," Simeon suggests. "Invite yourself and your young friend to her house, and I'll give you grand entertainments, and have out my service of gold plate, and make pretty Lily forget this man you love and I hate."

So to Lady Elinor's Lily Perry is presently taken; and the old lady is enraptured with the young girl's beauty, and prepares herself to aid in making a muddle of Lily's future with zeal and pleasure.

She is a little old lady, slightly deformed; but she declares herself to have been a fairy, a sylph, an ethereal beauty, in the days of her youth, and as no one can remember

these days, she is never contradicted. She is an active, restless little woman even now, agile and kittenish and gushing, and full of false enthusiasm and sham brilliancy, and fearfully high spirits; a ghastly old coquette, who believes in her love-winning properties still, though every one who knows her has long ago come to the conclusion that the only thing real about her is her bones; for the skin is enamel, and the colour is paint, and the teeth and hair are extremely variable, and the heart and sentiments are falser than anything else! She is a nice old lady, indeed, is Lady Elinor Worthington, and people find her intensely amusing when she is in town, and only speculate as to whether she really poisoned her husband for threatening to tell that he had been forced to marry her at the point of her papa's sword when she is away.

On one hot day in a long past year, she had fancied a resemblance in herself to Cleo-

patra, and forthwith she organised a Richmond party, and went up the river in a boat under a flame-coloured canopy, with black locks streaming wildly around her, a sandalled foot in full view, and a fancy Egyptian garment of scanty proportions over her skinny little person, to the scandal of so much of the world as thronged the banks to look at Lady Elinor's current folly. Shortly after this she had costumed as Corinne, and crowned herself with a wreath of bays on the strength of having written a volume of very immoral and immaterial poetry, which she read aloud with passion and emphasis, at several of her evening parties. She has been robed to the chin, and desperately *décolletée* in rapid succession for a longer number of years than one would care to enumerate. She has gained a name for foolish vanity beyond every one of her foolishly vain compeers. Her name has been called in question (mainly through her own

vainglorious boasts) and her stories have been refuted a thousand times. Yet still she kept her place in the world, and the denizens of it flocked around her tattered, mud-bespattered old standard wheresoever she erected it, and called attention to the fact.

She is not a good, a worthy, or a respected woman, but she is a popular and well-known woman, and she struggles hard to remain this latter thing, and never fades away from any one's mind through lack of continually stirring up that mind with a hint of her existence.

It is at her house in Kensington that the Garveston Lily makes her entrance into London society. Lady Elinor organises a reception for her niece's young country friend at once, and asks every one whose name sounds this year, and her audacity is well rewarded.

"That little girl you have taken up shall

be noticeable, my dear, for I won't have too many other women," Lady Elinor says to her niece, Lady Marguerite; and the latter answers,—

"I don't care about other men, or any of the women, if you get the *one* man here whom I want to meet her, and that is your promising young friend, Simeon Samuel."

"He's a left-off glove of your own, isn't he?" the old lady asks. "You were always kind-hearted, my dear, — always ready to give away what you didn't want yourself."

"I certainly am ready to give him away to Lily," Lady Marguerite answers; "so get him here often, and don't have any one to rival him."

"The one man that all London is trying to get now is Lord Lethringham," Lady Elinor says. "He has flashed out of the obscurity he has buried himself in ever since

he came to the title, and we're all wild about him."

"But I don't want him to get wild about Lily, for I am a sincere friend of Simeon Samuel's," her niece replies.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is a great crowd at Lady Elinor's to-night. The man who has written *the* successful novel of the season is here; and here also is a political martyr, and an African explorer, and a scientific man who poisoned his wife by accident, and has found himself the centre of attraction in the fashionable world ever since the catastrophe. Around these revolve the usual throng that one meets at such places. In one corner rises the fez of an Oriental ambassador, who has been inveigled here for a few minutes; and the successful novelist and scientific murderer both pale into insignificance before

him. But his light in turn is put out, and he finds himself comparatively neglected when Lord Lethringham comes in.

Lily sees him, hears his name and rank, and marks the buzz of almost homage that greets him as he makes his way to his hostess; and her heart bounds tumultuously for a moment, and then sinks down despairingly. Is it because he is the Earl of Lethringham that he has dared to treat her as a mere pastime, a pretty rustic maiden, with whom he, as a man of rank, was perfectly justified in amusing himself during his hours of idleness? Her eyes ache as she looks at him, and her heart is nearly broken; but for all their aching, those eyes flash with greater brilliancy than ever, and her beauty is more striking and enthralling at this moment than it has ever been before.

So at least deems Mr Simeon Samuel, who makes his way to her side with a speed that

is doubly flattering when contrasted with the manner in which Lord Lethringham seems determined to abstain from seeking her. And thus it is that before she is aware of what she is doing, Lily finds herself in a prettily arranged little boudoir, that is curtained off from the garish gilded drawing-room, listening to unmistakable words of love from the unpromising-looking artist.

"Now look here," he is saying; "I looked straight into your eyes when I saw you first, and liked what I read there, though all your thoughts were given to another man at the time. I said to myself, 'Simeon, you will ask this girl to be your wife, and she will say "Yes," and you will give her a beautiful house, and some of the finest diamonds in England for her to wear on her pretty brow and neck and arms.' Oh, I will dress you so, Lily!"

"But, Mr Samuel, stop," she pants; for

though she has resolved, since catching sight of her false love in his true colours, not to wear the willow for him, but to marry "the first man who asks her," her resolution is shaken a little when this first man turns out to be Mr Simeon Samuel.

"No, no; why should I stop telling you of the pretty things I shall give my pretty wife?—for you will be my wife, and all the young ladies who are here to-night are envying you already for going to be the mistress of that fine handsome house on Campden Hill; and Lord Lethringham, my good friend Lethringham, is biting his lips with vexation at the thought of your forgetting him, and the foolish deception he practised upon you so readily. Say 'Yes,' Lily, and let me go and tell Lady Marguerite, and she will the others."

"Not to-night, pray,—not to-night!" she cries passionately, determining to go on with the degradation, but still unable to

bear the thought of making it manifest to the man she loves so soon.

"Well, well," Simeon says soothingly, "we will keep our sweet secret to-night, though it's not kind to my good friends, Lady Elinor and Lady Marguerite, to do it. But you must see my ring. You look here. I brought it for you to-night, and you must put it on, and your pretty hand will then be the richest hand in the room. Yes, there's not a countess here with such a diamond ring as this on."

He produces a ring in which a diamond about the size of a giant pea is set, and proceeds to strip off Lily's glove and force the ring on her trembling finger. It is so huge that the glove will not go on again, and Lily feels a sickening conviction that it will be the means of concentrating all the light and all the eyes and observation of the room upon her.

"Keep it till to-morrow, please," she

says. "Keep it till my father and mother know of—"

"Our engagement? Look here, Lily," —he takes a letter from his pocket as he speaks, — "this I wrote before I came to-night, to your father, asking for his consent—which he will give, you know, gladly; and my man is at the door to take it to the post now, and it will leave London by the three o'clock post, and be at Garveston by to-morrow afternoon. But you have said 'Yes,' and you are my betrothed, and you must wear my ring, and you must let me kiss you!"

"Not yet, not yet!" she says, with a shudder, slipping away from him. And in her haste to get into the society which at least will be a safeguard from his kisses, she goes back into the room with the ring blazing on her finger.

Lady Marguerite, softly revolving her blue orbs, sees it first, and she hastens to

fix it there for ever by commenting upon it openly.

"Lily!" she exclaims, with affected surprise, "is it possible you have been so fortunate? Is it true that you have really brought down the big game?"

"It's true that I have just engaged myself to Mr Samuel," Lily says hurriedly—for she sees Lord Lethringham, the man she has known as "Harold Lomax," approaching her at last, and she wants to arm herself against her own weakness in his favour.

Lady Marguerite is a model friend. Even under the trying circumstances of meeting her old lover under his true colours for the first time, she does not forget to warmly and openly congratulate Lily, and commit the latter irrevocably to the fate she has chosen.

"I can't even stay to scold you for having practised your little deception upon

us for some unexplained reason, for I want to tell you to join with me in congratulating this lucky girl on the brilliant fate she has achieved," Lady Marguerite says to the young peer, whose jealous eyes have already fallen on that horrible ring. "Lord Lethringham, if you were as entirely the artist you once made us believe you were, and nothing else, you would better appreciate the honour Miss Perry has done herself in bringing such a painter as Simeon Samuel to her feet; but even as it is, absorbed as you are in the vortex of fashion, you will, I am sure, congratulate him on having won such a fair face, and her on having won such a fair fate?"

"I'll do both with the best grace I can assume in my astonishment, if the lady lays her commands upon me to do so," he says, looking at Lily and at her blazing ring.

Then Lily looks up at him, and their

eyes meet, and he knows in a flash that he has been mistaken latterly, and that Lily has loved him through it all, and would have married "Harold Lomax" without demur, an only he had asked her.

But these mistakes are not rectified nearly so readily as they are made. He is on the point of drawing her aside, and of shaking off Lady Marguerite, who clings to them both like a bad name or a burr, when their effusive hostess comes to the fore to play Mr Samuel's game.

"My dear child," she begins, pitching her voice in the key she always uses when she is about to declaim one of her own poems, "my house is famous for being the stage on which the best matches of the season are arranged; and yours will add to its reputation. All London will know to-morrow that the celebrated painter, Simeon Samuel, won his beautiful bride at one of good-natured old Lady Elinor's

gatherings. I ought to have had a dozen daughters. My mere atmosphere is conducive to happy marriages."

The tones and the words bring a little crowd about Lily in a moment; and as her ladyship babbles on, the girl sees Lord Lethringham and hope and happiness receding from her. He is going away without offering her a word of explanation, without making an effort to save her. Ah, well! if he can do so coolly and resignedly, with equal coolness and resignation will she meet her fate.

So she suffers Mr Samuel to stand about by her side for the remainder of that wearily long evening, and listens with all the patience she can command to the catalogue he gives her of his gold plate and diamonds. She is to be pitied, but he is to be pitied too, poor wretch! for he labours under the delusion that this girl whom he has gained has not the soul to

appreciate the artist part of his nature. He worships her loveliness, which is of the order that improves as it ripens. He knows that her beauty will be as famous as his talent, and that she will redound to his credit in a way that will be intensely gratifying to him as a man. But he takes it for granted that if he speaks to her of anything higher than his gold and his gems, that he will not appeal to her in the least. And so they will be apart, always apart, he knows.

He has a word or two with his old acquaintance and whilom fellow-labourer, Lord Lethringham, by-and-by.

"So you have thrown aside disguise and come out in your proper garb of rank and respectability?" he says to Lethringham. And the latter replies,—

"And you have assumed a virtue you do not possess, and professed to want to enter the ranks of married men, Simeon."

Mr Samuel laughs and scowls a little.

"My wife will be the handsomest woman in London, and she shall help to make my house the pleasantest, and she shall walk in silk attire and siller have to spare, and in return she shall show the world that I *am* her lord and master; and the friends she welcomes to her beautifully appointed home shall be friends of my choosing," he says with a small threatening air that Lethringham would resent if he did not still love Lily so well.

"Heaven help her when she's in our clever little friend's clutches legally!" Lethringham says presently to Lady Marguerite, who tells him that it gives her "such pleasure" to think of the match that has just been arranged.

"I am so happily married myself," she says tauntingly, "I naturally long to see my friend equally so. We were fellow-subjects in your series of experiments on

the female heart and credulity, you know, and narrowly escaped being fellow-sufferers. When you look at us, you must feel glad of the miracle that saved us from caring about you beyond the hour!"

"When I look at you and listen, I am glad indeed that you didn't care about me beyond the hour. That's not complimentary, I know; but we need not be complimentary to one another when we're alone," he says, goaded into bitterness and to expressing himself harshly by this woman's cool assumption that Lily is as heartless as herself.

She shrugs her shoulders carelessly. "Yes; my retirement from the lists in which you as a stranger knight waged war against women—"

"Lady Marguerite!"

"Don't interrupt me indignantly. It was warfare against us, and warfare of a most ignoble kind, in which you engaged.

You allowed a spirit of mystery to invade your atmosphere and disturb our peace, and you rather favoured the suspicion that the mystery was not an honourable one: it was ignoble warfare that you waged, Lord Lethringham; for in fighting your foolish little battle, you were very careless as to whether your feeble feminine allies got wounded or not. You are angry with me now, I can see, because I have been the means of bringing about this engagement between Mr Samuel and Lily Perry. But what better fate could a girl whose character has been tainted by *your* treatment hope to gain? She has done well, I tell you; and she feels she has done well. Of course, if you present yourself before her now with your title and a little well-feigned regret for the past, she will be ready to break her troth to the commoner and resume her love for you. It will be easily done, and if *you* like to believe in it, why—we will

all forget her perfidy when she wears a coronet!"

In his heart Lethringham does not believe what she says and implies, but she says and implies it with that air and grace, with that assumption of there being something in what she says, in "its being well to listen to her before further mischief comes of not having listened to her before," which it has been one of woman's attributes in all ages to employ, that he does listen, and does permit himself to behave as if he believed.

"If the lovely Lily is what you hint, your friend Mr Samuel is not too greatly to be congratulated; but as for the part *you* have played in this business, Lady Marguerite, I can only say I hope no decent woman will ever stoop to play it again."

She turns upon him now in a rage that would be righteous were the cause other

than herself—in a rage that would be loud and visible to all the room were she not a gentlewoman. As it is, no one but herself knows how unworthy is the original cause—no one but Lethringham hears the tones in which she makes that knowledge felt by him.

"The man who wins Lily Perry is *not* to be congratulated, for her 'best' has gone in loving you, who are so unworthy of a woman's love that you can even taunt her with it. Thanks! Yes, if you will take me back to my aunt and the rest of the people, I shall be glad, for I think you and I know each other, and have had enough of each other at last."

She loves him and loathes him as she places her hand shiveringly on his arm, and he winds his way back with her to the central point of attraction—Lady Elinor and the newly-engaged couple. As old lovers, Lady Marguerite and Lord Leth-

ringham dislike each other extremely; but as friends, they could like one another very well indeed, were it not for the Lily Perry element. But as it is, "He likes that girl, who can't compare with me, twice as well as he ever did me," Lady Marguerite thinks, and Lethringham says to himself,—"If I hadn't been in mufti, like a fool, Marguerite would have had me gladly enough; as it is, she's annoyed to think that Lily might have had the place above her if it hadn't been for that confounded Jew."

Altogether there is a great want of harmony among the guests at Lady Elinor's this night; and her old ladyship, who detects the jars in her social melody, nearly comes to pieces before the right time in her annoyance.

"I meant it to be such a success," she whimpers; "and here are Lethringham and Samuel at odds about that girl of yours,

who is nobody, Marguerite. I wish your husband would come up and see about your lady friends; the men may be always left to your own discretion, I am sure."

"I think you distress yourself about trifles too much at your age," Lady Marguerite says severely.

"Do you call them 'trifles'—the two best men I have in the room sparring about a girl whose name one can't be sure of, and my new front tooth left in an olive through agitation? Marguerite, these may be trifles to you, who have the world before you, but to me—" The rest of her poor old ladyship's speech is silence, for the hour is late, and she hates to expose that vacant gum, and she is realising that her friends are intensely selfish, in that they are staying on long after what is real of her is longing to be in bed.

"The people shall go. It's on account of Lethringham that they are staying so late."

"And he knew you when he chose to pass as a poor painter, Marguerite; and, oh dear! from all I've heard about that young painter Lomax, you might have been a countess if you liked. And if I had my day to go over again—"

"You would go to bed earlier and lead a more wholesome life, and so would I," Lady Marguerite interrupts impatiently. "Aunt Elinor, the evening is over, and now I have to face this girl who has 'accomplished her destiny' so brilliantly in your house to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

IT makes a great commotion down in quiet Garveston when the news of Lily s engagement is received there. Mr Samuel's letter to Mr Perry is all that a prudent parent could desire. He will settle a thousand a year on Lily for his life, and three thousand a year after his death, provided she does not marry again.

"What more can any girl desire—any good girl like our Lily?" Mrs Perry says to her husband. He shakes his head dubiously in reply; and she goes on,—

"My dear, I'm sure Lily wouldn't dream

of marrying him if she didn't love him, and if she loves him and loses him, she will never want to replace him."

"You talk like a—woman," Mr Perry says. "Samuel's offer is a liberal one, but I don't like the idea of selling a hand of mine to a man after he is in his grave."

"I shouldn't look upon it in that light if you died and I survived you," Mrs Perry says, tearfully; and her husband answers,—

"No, my dear, ours was a different case; this isn't what I call a flesh-and-blood marriage, but it's a business-like exchange—so much youth and beauty for so much wealth and luxury. Lily seems to be satisfied, and as she is so, let us hope she will please herself while he lives; but I don't mean to have it on my conscience that if he dies before her she is to be fettered to his corpse, and that's what it comes to. If he will give up that clause in the settlements, and pro-

mise that he won't put it into his will after his marriage, I'll give my consent to his marrying my daughter; if he won't, why Lily must come home again, and take her chance of marrying some one who won't want to conduct himself like an amorous ghost."

"I am sure I *did* think it was Mr Lomax all the time, and I should have liked him ever so much better for Lily than this Mr Samuel," the mother says, with a sigh.

"Don't distress yourself about that having gone off," Mr Perry says gravely. "I'm more annoyed about this other having come on. Samuel's family are sure to look upon him as a renegade, and to regard Lily coldly, as the cause of his being so. All his wealth won't cover the jars and discords that will arise between them on account of the difference of creeds."

"I don't fancy he's strict—not what you would call a faithful Jew," Mrs Perry says

with a vague hope that she is making the matter better.

"I should like him and trust him better if he were; however, I must write to him and to Lily, and we must hope for the best for our child."

Lily's engagement is soon a settled and widely-known thing, for Mr Samuel is not reticent on the point of having won a beauty who will take the artistic taste of the day by storm. He proceeds to render her celebrated without delay, paints her as Fair Rosamond and Helen of Troy, and finds that he has not been mistaken in his anticipations of the extraordinary sensation the representation of her brilliant charms produces. And for a while, Lily, dazed by the flattery and the strife, by the continual round of excitement and pleasure, and the novelty of being the topic and chief object wherever she goes, fancies herself to be supremely happy.

But she has her moments, even her hours of depression, and something near akin to despair, and she soon is made to understand that the man she has promised to marry honours and glorifies her merely as a reflector of his own honour and glory. As for his family, to whom he is bound by strong ties of affection, they openly treat the engagement as a dire grievance against themselves, and bemoan Simeon's loss of caste with a frankness that frequently drives Lily into *almost* determining to break her chains.

Almost, but not quite; for Lord Lethringham is very much about her daily path now, and she will not give him the pleasure of seeing that she is anything but altogether pleased and satisfied with the prospect of the life that lies before her: for in her heart he still stands accused of having played fast and loose with her, and of never having meant anything more than the amusement of his idle hours.

To her intense mortification, he is present in Lady Elinor's drawing-room on the occasion of Mrs and the Miss Samuels coming to pay their first call upon her as the acknowledged betrothed of their son and brother. All the preliminaries of the marriage are arranged, and in a few days Mrs Perry is coming up to town to take the responsibility of getting the trousseau upon herself, Lady Marguerite and her aunt having counselled greater extravagance than Lily feels justified in indulging in.

The girl is sitting on a low chair by a French window, and Lord Lethringham has just crossed the room to show her a song he has himself written and composed, which he wants her to "try over for him." The pair are more nearly alone than they have been since that parting hour at Garveston, when they played at cross-purposes and lost their opportunity

of coming to a happy understanding, and acknowledging the love each felt for the other. Hitherto, since his reappearance on the boards under his own proper name and character, the jealousy of Lady Marguerite has intervened to prevent his getting private speech with Lily. But to-day her watchful and wary ladyship is out, and old Lady Elinor will never interfere to spoil love-sport, more especially if it may lead to mischief. Accordingly she absorbs herself in what the *World* says, and Lord Lethringham has time and opportunity to bring his verses and their meaning before Lily.

"Will you read them to me?" he says. "My own words will sound better if you lend to them 'the beauty of your voice,' as Longfellow says."

"What a dear old man Longfellow must be," she answers, nervously playing with the sheet of paper on which the words are

written, and seeking to avoid the awful ordeal that it will be to her to read them as if she were an indifferent person, uninterested in anything that concerned him. "What a dear old man Longfellow must be. I saw a manuscript poem of his the other day, written when he was seventy-two, on the occasion of the village children making him a present of a chair made from the wood of the 'Spreading Chestnut-tree,' which he sang so gloriously years ago; such a dear, good, *true* man!"

Lily sighs as she brings her encomium to a conclusion, and Lethringham takes up the parable.

"'Truth' is the quality that we prize most highly in one another, after all; and with good reason, for if we are 'true,' true to ourselves, we—"

"Can never descend to act a lie, any more than to speak one," Lily interrupts. "Who *is* true? You were not when you came to

me and talked of 'poverty and struggle, and the constant strife and endeavour of your life,' when all the time you were a rich nobleman, and did not know what strife and endeavour meant. And since that time have you been 'true'—have you been honest and generous in coming in my way so constantly?"

"Yes, I have," he says fluently. "In this, at least, I have been faithful to every noble instinct that I have; I want to save you, Lily, from a fate you shrink from, gorgeously as it is gilded and jewelled. Be true now! Tell me that this contemplated marriage is as hateful to you as it is."

"Mrs and the Miss Samuels," Lady Elinor's little fat page announces; and a plump and unwieldy short woman, with mahogany-coloured eyes, that lolled resentfully at Lily, waddles into the room, followed by a couple of thin, tightly-dressed

short girls, with colossal noses, and fringes that protrude with frizzly strength far beyond their foreheads.

"I have come to see my son Simeon Samuel's choice and to tell her what a fortunate young lady she is," Mrs Samuel says puffily; and Lily tries to infuse a little cordiality into her own manner in order to cover the awkwardness of the meeting.

"Simeon will come here presently, but he thought we should get better acquainted with each other if we came without him at first," one of the small-bodied, big-headed sisters chime in. Then they both make a feint of kissing Lily's cheek with their rather cruel-looking lips; and their hands, which feel thick even through their six-buttoned gloves, wrap themselves round her thin little fingers, and altogether she is absorbed against her will into the unpleasant-looking family circle.

"And this gentleman?" Mrs Samuel

asks, when Lady Elinor has advanced to do the honours. "Is he one of your family, too, Lily?"

Lily hastens to explain that Lord Lethringham is a "mere acquaintance."

"Oh, we're a very large family ourselves; so it's well, perhaps, that Simeon's wife shouldn't have too many cousins," the old lady goes on, struggling to remove some of the rings which she wears outside her gloves, in order that she may the better manipulate the sheet of music. "Were you going to sing this?" she asks Lily, abruptly; and the girl, in her embarrassment and indignation, replies,—

"No; Lord Lethringham had only just given it to me when you came in. *He* sings that song."

"He wrote them to you, and he sings them, does he? Now, you look here—perhaps he'll sing them now?" Mrs Samuel says in oiliest accents, but with

a vindictive glance from her rolling eyes at the young man who presumes to do so much without being a cousin.

"Perhaps you will sing them now? I'll accompany you," Lily cries, standing up defiantly; and mamma folds her fat hands over her portly little person, and wishes that her Simeon were here to see the conduct of this Christian girl.

"I *can't* play it!" Lily exclaims, after striking a few chords at random; and Mrs Samuel says (with an eye to her absent Simeon's interests),—

"Read it, or let his lordship read it. We all like poetry in the Samuel family. My son Simeon writes very pretty verses himself."

"Then I hope that these may be fortunate enough to meet with your approbation," Lord Lethringham says, resolving to read them with all their meaning, and fondly hoping that through their agency an order of release may come for Lily.

"Dunkellin Chase is a wood near Garveston, I must explain, in order that you may understand why I expect Miss Perry to feel a strong local, almost a personal, interest in my little song," he says carelessly; and then, before Lily can realise all the danger there is in the proceeding, he reads,—

"Do you ask me, 'What have I been doing
Since that day you saw me last?'
I've been watching, and waiting, and wooing
For a sign from you and the past.
Now the sign has been given—a quiver
Passed over your downcast face
Just now, as I spoke of the river
That runs through Dunkellin Chase.

'What have I been doing?' Your question
Makes me feel how I've wronged the time,
In making my life a suggestion
For you to supply the rhyme.
I've been thinking of you, and trying
All the while to win the race,
Which began for me in the dying
Summer warmth in Dunkellin Chase.

'What have I been doing?' Ah, dearest,
'Twould be well for me could I say
That you had been ever nearest
To my heart since that love-lit day.
But Fame lured me on to seek her
(Fame's a rival who shows no grace),
And I have grown stronger and weaker
Since that day in Dunkellin Chase.

But now all my strength is weakness,
As the tones of your voice once more,
With their old imperial meekness,
Stir the depths of my true heart's core.
Fame and Fortune are sweet if you'll share them
With me—if you'll help me to trace!—"

"Why it's an offer—a proposal of marriage! It's an insult to my son Simeon that you should listen!" Mrs Samuel pants; and Lily draws herself up, and calmly, but with a crimsoning face, says,—

"Good-bye, Lord Lethringham. The next time choose your audience better. Never read one of your love-lays to people who can't discriminate between the poet and his poetry."

Mrs Samuel and the Miss Samuels are chatting volubly to Lady Elinor, who is enjoying all she understands of the mischief that has been already made, and under cover of their sibilant clatter Lethringham mutters,—

"The meaning of the song is for you. You must understand that at last. Answer it plainly."

"I will. I must go on my way, and you must get out of it," she says sadly; and Lord Lethringham is obliged to retire, with the distinct understanding well impressed on his mind, that Lily means to keep to the engagement she has made in despair.

Simeon's jealous and affectionate mother has a great deal to say on the subject of Lily's indiscretion in listening to the verses, and Lethringham's impertinence in addressing them to her. But as she abstains from saying it to Lily, the girl bears her

future mother-in-law's anger with the calm of utter indifference. As for Simeon, having made up his mind that it will, on the whole, be beneficial to him for him to gratify his taste and marry her, he disregards the family breezes, and does not suffer them to deter him from the course on which he is bent on sailing.

"My mamma was not pleased at Lethringham being here with you to-day, or with his manner, Lily," Simeon says to his betrothed that evening. Then, as Lily deigns no reply, he hastens to add,—

"But I tell her Lethringham is a friend of mine, and I can take care of my own honour and trust you."

"Your mother must not interfere with me. If she does, I shall resent it, and will never go near her, nor allow her to come to me. She will never like me, and I shall never like her. You had better keep us apart."

"We are a very united and affectionate family," he begins; and she says,—

"How wise you would be not to introduce me into it."

He scowls at her before he answers.

"No, no; we should be foolish to quarrel, and mar the beautiful plan we have made. We will be very sensible people, and supplement each other in the way that will so well suit us. I am very gentle—oh, so very gentle! If you are kind and good to me, Lily, you shall be the loveliest woman."

All the while he is saying this, in tones that fall like May dew, he is thinking,—

"I will frighten her so when she is my wife that she shall never dare to do anything to annoy me. I will say such things to her on our wedding-day, directly she gets away alone with me, that will keep her trembling all her life for fear

of a repetition of them. I will make her my slave, and that will soften her beauty and improve her. I will make her to be more terrified when she is out of my presence than when she is in it, in case she may be misreported. I will break her spirit and bow her heart; but her beauty shall be adorned as no man in London adorns his wife, and Lethringham shall never be able to interfere to spare her."

Lady Marguerite takes up her parable this same night in a way that strengthens Simeon's case.

"Of course, not having been present, I can't say who was right and who was wrong, but I think that for your sake Lethringham ought to have been more careful to-day."

"I don't want to hear anything more about it," Lily says. "It was odious enough to go through it once—to hear it talked over will be more odious still; but," she

continues, inconsistently pursuing the subject she has herself tabooed, "but let me tell you that it was Mrs Samuel, and not Lethringham, who behaved badly."

"Oh, it goes without saying that she *always* behaves vulgarly; but then she's your own, or almost your own, you know, Lily; and as Lethringham has shown you so clearly that he has nothing better to offer you, he might have the generosity to go on his way, and leave Simeon's claims upon you undisturbed."

Perhaps the most galling part of this galling speech is that portion of it which refers to Lily's oneness with the mother and family of Simeon. To be identified with him will be bad enough, but it is woman's lot customarily to be identified with man who is apart from her in reality. And it will be a legal bond, and she will have entered into it without any absolute coercion of her own will. But to hear Mrs Samuel

and the two thin-bodied, large-headed, frizzled-haired sisters spoken of as her "own or almost her own," she can hardly bear it.

"Lady Marguerite, you must not triumph over me so openly, or you shall have no further cause for triumphing at all! I am not married yet. I can still be poor and free if I like."

"Poverty and freedom in Garveston would be rather monotonous!" Lady Marguerite laughs.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD Mrs Lestrange is holding one of her pleasant, harmless, reviving little afternoon tea orgies in the pretty bright chintz and flower-adorned drawing-room, wherein the village ladies are wont to assemble themselves so gladly, and Lily Perry's approaching marriage is the subject that is under discussion.

"She will never be the same to me again, never!—no, Mrs Lestrange, not if you were to say she ought to be till doomsday, and I'm sure I should always listen to you."

"Then if you always listen to me, you'll listen now, my dear," the buxom, cheery

old queen of the village says kindly. "Lily Perry is a dear sweet girl, and will be a dear sweet woman all the days of her life; and if she isn't marrying quite as we, her old friends, could wish her to marry, why that's her misfortune, poor girl! and she will suffer for it far more than we can; but let us have it all brightness and good feeling down in Garveston on her wedding-day."

"I can't forget poor Fred! It may be the ruin of him, you see, Mrs Lestrange; and though for my own part I love Lily just as well as ever, still, as Fred's sister, I feel—"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" the old lady interrupts; "Fred couldn't have married her for ten years to come; and if she had been silly enough to listen to him, the end of the ten years would have found her a sensible old maid, full of requirements for her comfort and well-being that

he would have thought extravagant and been unable to gratify. It is much the best as it is, for the gentleman has boundless wealth, and is utterly devoid of prejudices, my niece Lady Marguerite writes."

"If he had a few more prejudices, he'd be a better Jew and a better man, Mr Perry seems to think," Laura says, clinging to Mr Perry's half-hearted approval of the match with the more fondness as she remembers what wonderful jewellery, and liberty, and luxury the marriage will secure to Lily.

"There's no doubt about it that Lily pursued him, going off to London directly he went in that way; so we'll *hope* she's fond of him," one lady says.

"For my part I shall always believe that she was fond of Fred. You know, Mrs Lestrange, that he has been devoted to her ever since he was a boy," Fred's sister says.

"That's the very reason why a girl like Lily Perry would undervalue his affection," another friend kindly puts in; and a fourth declares that she "always knew Lily was intensely worldly; and that for her (the speaker's) part she would not have looked at Mr Samuel even if he had been a Rothschild."

"But he's a professing Christian," Mrs Lestrange protests; and then they cry in chorus that "professions are nothing, and that a Jew born is a Jew in heart through all time."

By-and-by Lily comes home, accompanied by the two Miss Samuels, who, never having had any experience of life in a village, affably volunteer to visit the Perry family, in order, as they say, that the world may see that they are not in opposition to the match.

"Lily," her mother says to her, the morning after she comes back, "I'm afraid

you'll find that a good many old friends will look coldly upon you for this!"

"Friends are, like the rest of the world, faithless and unkind and untrustworthy directly they are put to the test," the girl says bitterly. "I think I can bear most things quietly though, now; so perhaps the coldness will cease to be shown when they see I don't care about it."

"Your love for Mr Samuel must be strong indeed, if you have grown indifferent to everybody else for his sake," the mother says disappointedly; and Lily answers,—

"It may not be love; but you know there are other feelings than 'love' frequently aroused by such a marriage as mine will be, mother. Love! you don't suppose for a moment that I feel *that* for *him!*"

"Oh, Lily, Lily, think well before you marry him then," the anxious mother cries

out; "think, my child! it's for life. Oh, Lily, darling, not all his wealth will make you happy, if you are tied to a man for whom you have—"

"Neither affection nor respect, nor anything but strong dislike," Lily interrupts. "But it's gone too far, mother. I acknowledged that I accepted him in such mad haste just because I wanted some one else to see that I was not fretting for *him*."

"You mean Mr Lomax?"

"Yes; he's Lord Lethringham in reality, and I can't forgive him for having played me the trick of cultivating an intimacy with us all under false pretences. He was a great lord, and I a country lawyer's daughter; and though I was good enough to fool with during the sultry summer days when he was playing at painting, I was not good enough to be treated as he would have treated a girl of his own rank. I might flirt with Mr Lomax, but not with

Lord Lethringham; that's what I thought then, mother, and in revenge and despair I engaged myself to a man whom I know Lord Lethringham *loathes.* I knew he would hate to think that, having known *him,* I could decline on to such a lower nature as Samuel's; so to hurt him through his pride, if I couldn't through his heart, I committed heart-suicide, and I must abide by it. I'm absorbed into the Samuel family now, though they dislike me."

"And those awful sisters are here already, identifying themselves with us in a way that I can't bear," says Mrs Lestrange, "with their fat feet and hands stuck into tight shoes and gloves, and every colour of the rainbow in their raiment, and every variety of precious stones on their person, despising us for being poor, and making me blush before my neighbours at the thought that they'll be related to my own child. Break off the engagement, Lily;

better live an old maid all your life, and let Lord Lethringham and all the world think you're wearing the willow for him, than commit the sin of such a marriage."

But Lily only cries in answer to this appeal, and tells her mother that she "has not the courage to break her chains; that she must wear them patiently, and try to do her heartless duty to the unfortunate man whom she is going to marry." Then she makes an effort to begin fulfilling that duty at once by going out for a walk through the village with the Miss Samuels, who are arrayed like queens of Sheba on a small scale, for a country promenade.

"We may take a cross-country cut to come home; won't you find lace flounces rather in the way if we have to climb stiles?" Lily suggests; and they reply, that "these are the plainest dresses they have brought with them, and that it is of no consequence if they do tear their

lace flounces, as they have plenty of money to buy more."

In the course of their walk they meet Fred Dalton, and Lily, by a strong expression of frank, unchanged cordiality, induces him to turn and accompany them. At first they all four walk together, but by-and-by, when they find themselves in a narrow woodland path, the sisters Samuel drop behind, and Lily and her unhappy young lover are virtually alone. Then for the first time she realises that there is something grand as well as lovable about the boy.

"I saw Lord Lethringham last night, Lily; he is staying at the Lestranges," he begins, averting his eyes from her face, in order not to see the confusion which he knows will cover it.

"Indeed! Rather odd of Lady Marguerite not to have told me he was coming or come," she says, with feigned carelessness, with a real joyful hope.

"Not at all odd, considering what a selfish beast of a woman she is!" Fred says hotly. "Yes, Lily, she is that. I know all the story—how she jilted Lethringham and made you her cat's-paw, and how he then fell in love with you. He told me last night, and told me more than that, that she's the one who urged Samuel on—who knocked up your engagement, in fact."

"It is not honourable of LordLethringham to have told you all this," Lily says angrily.

"Yes, it is. He's not going to stand still and see you sold, if you care for him? He has been put here by Lady Marguerite, to sting you, as she thinks, by going to see you married to Samuel; but if you love him, he'll turn the tables on her with a vengeance!"

"There's no time now. Oh, Fred don't, don't worry and upset me!" she says, hurriedly and tremblingly. "It's cruel now—now when it's too late. *His* sisters are close

behind us, and I am to be married the day after to-morrow."

"So you shall be, but *not* to Samuel," Fred cries triumphantly. "Lethringham wouldn't try to see you till he had explained to me, for fear you should fly off and misunderstand him as you did before. Lily, it will be hard enough for me to see you married to anybody; but it will be heaven to me to have you married to Lord Lethringham instead of to that Jew. Quick, say yes!"

"Oh yes,—what *can* I do?" Lily pants, as the two sisters trip up, with suspicion on their faces and planted in their hearts.

"Lily flirted in a most disgraceful manner with a youth called Fred Dalton this morning; you will have to keep a very close guard over her, I fear, my dear brother Simeon," one of them writes off by this day's post. And so on the following day, when Mr Samuel arrives upon the scene, it is of

Fred Dalton that he is jealous, and over Fred Dalton that he mounts so close a guard that Lily has plenty of liberty to meet Lord Lethringham.

The two young Daltons have been dining with them, and the whole party are assembled in the drawing-room after dinner. One of the Miss Samuels professes to be great at divining characters through the medium of the handwriting, and all of them but Lily are submitting specimens of their caligraphy to her. They cluster about her while she tickles their vanity by endowing them with either exalted or remarkable qualities and qualifications, and in particular gives her brother Simeon credit for such superhuman merit and talent, that with a gratified smile he turns to see if his Lily is listening to the long roll of his virtues.

His Lily is gone, "gone upstairs with a headache." His sister, who does not want to be sent in search of her, thinks "she has

been complaining of a headache all day, and nothing cures Lily's headache but lying down."

Mr Samuel fidgets a little, but consoles himself by keeping such an observant watch over Fred Dalton, as shall effectually prevent that young man from slipping unobserved out of the room, if he has that evil design.

It is a chilly October night, and Lily shudders as much from cold as from nervousness as she walks through the dark village street down to old Mrs Lestrange's house. A few stragglers are about, going to and from the village shops or the public-houses, and it seems to the girl that her purpose in going to her old friend at this hour alone must be patent to every one. Supposing Simeon suspects anything, too, and follows her down soon, before she has had time to come to an understanding with the "one" whom she is going to meet! Supposing the two men quarrel and fight

about her, what a lasting disgrace that will be! After all, is she not worse than weak and wrong to have allowed herself to be over-persuaded by Fred into taking this indiscreet step! Supposing Lord Lethringham should, after all, not care to marry a girl who is so lightly won from her plighted troth on the eve of her wedding-day! This last possibility is fraught with such awful consequences, that she is just on the point of turning and speeding home again, when the light from Mrs Lestrange's drawing-room windows beams forth cheerily and encouragingly upon her. If she does turn back now, nothing can occur to stay her progress to the altar to-morrow morning, and her life will have to be lived with Simeon and his odious sisters, and her love for Lethringham will be a lasting scourge and snare to her.

"I'll go on, and if he scorns me for being over-fond and over-ready, I'll go home and

confess my sin and shame and deceit to Simeon, and pray him to forgive me and release me. As mother says, 'Anything better than a loveless marriage.'" So she rings the bell and goes in.

The bonnie old dowager queen of Garveston welcomes Lily. By her side is seated one at the sight of whom all Lily's strength and composure becomes weakness and confusion.

Lord Lethringham, looking handsomer and happier than ever, waits till the old lady has greeted Lily, and then he comes forward and takes her in his arms.

"Don't be frightened, dear," he says. "You would not have come unless you had meant that I was free to show my love for the girl who will be my wife to-morrow. There must be no hesitation or doubt, for I have to settle the whole thing to-night. No one shall be able to say that from the moment I was sure of you I halted once."

"I'll give you an hour alone to begin to settle matters," Mrs Lestrange says; "and then, my dear young people, I shall insist on your going straight to Lily's father's house, and being bold and straightforward and honest. If Mr Samuel is half a man, he will be glad that my niece's mischievous scheme has been defeated, and that two people who love one another fondly are going to be happy. In an hour I shall come back, and expect to find your plans perfectly arranged."

But when she comes back in an hour, she finds that their plans are as unformed as when she left, and that love has been lord of all, to the exclusion of every other consideration. But Lily has grown quite calm and composed about the inevitable coming scene, for "Lethringham will be sure to do everything *so* perfectly that no one can feel annoyed with him."

"He's your hero, my dear; but I think

I can find it in my heart to forgive Mr Samuel if he fails to see the beauty and perfection of a course of conduct which has ended in his losing you."

Mrs Lestrange laughs, and then she urges upon the happy pair the expediency of their going to Lily's home and explaining the state of the case.

"My wedding-dress is laid out ready to put on, and mamma has been busy all day arranging the breakfast," Lily says, half tearfully. "I shall never be able to face that wedding-cake after disappointing it so cruelly. Lethringham, what a lot of trouble you would have saved us all if you hadn't tried to live a new edition of the Lord of Burleigh story!"

"I hope you'll not follow my stupid example, and allow the 'burden of an honour unto which you were not born' to weigh you into an untimely grave," he says; and Lily draws herself up, and shows him plainly

that she will wear her countess-ship as if it belonged to her by right of birth.

But now the moment has come when they must go up to the house and face the family, and explain, and defy, and apologise, and greatly grieve several people, and extenuate their own conduct as as well they can.

With pride and a new-born sense of pleasure and power, Lily treads the village streets leaning on her lover's arm. A few loungers are about still, and they stare at her with the uncomplimentary air of wonder of their order, and say to one another that "these are nice rigs for Master Perry's daughter, wot's going to marry the rich Jew to-morrow, to be up to!" But Lily knows that to-morrow will set her quite straight in popular opinion, and that as the Countess of Lethringham she need not fear what Garveston scandal says. But when she comes to the portals of her father's door her spirits desert her, and her footsteps halt.

"How will you begin?" she asks, bringing him to a standstill.

"I shall see your father for five minutes alone, and in two minutes tell my story and win his aid."

"No, see mamma first; she'll break it to papa better than you can."

"She wouldn't do it so quickly, I fear. Now come in, and go quietly to your room till I send for you. Then stand by me, Lily; keep your vow to me, whatever they may say to urge you to break it."

"Yes," Lily says, drawing a deep sigh, and opening the door with much assumed firmness, "I will be brave and true."

But their programme is not destined to be carried out. The moment they open the door they find themselves in the midst of a laughing, chattering band, who are obeying Mrs Perry's command to come and see how lovely the breakfast-table looks. Through a vista of open doorway and

merry faces, Lily catches a glimpse of the cake she has declared she cannot face—the cake, crowned with flowers and frosted sugar and silver ribbons, rising above all the other dainties that have been specially prepared for the marriage feast. And there is Simeon Samuel, looking applaudingly at the efforts these poor people are making to do honour to the rich man who is going to wed their daughter. It is altogether too overwhelming a spectacle for Lily, her proper part while contemplating, and so she forgets her "business," and obeys the dictates of her heart (always the best prompter), and with a little cry of relief makes a rush into her astonished mother's arms.

"Whatever the others may do, you'll be my best friend, mother," she falters out; and "the rest" say a great many things, and a perfect Babel ensues, and for a time, as no one will listen to him,

Lord Lethringham finds it extremely difficult to explain why it is perfectly right and proper that Lily should appear leaning on his arm at this hour of the night, when, in what they were all thinking the "right order of things," she ought to have been improving the shining hours with Mr Simeon Samuel.

But though there is a great deal of consternation expressed, Lily does not find herself the sharply-contested point she had anticipated being. Mr Samuel does not renounce her gladly, but, after words which Lord Lethringham says to him privately, he does renounce her in a sulkily assenting way, that makes her parents feel that their darling has escaped some great danger. What those words are need not be told here; but it may be surmised that they bore some reference to a person who had worn the diamonds once with which the Garveston Lily has recently been adorned.

And it may further be surmised that the same person's claim to Mr Samuel's fidelity is a stronger legal one than his late conduct has led the Perrys to suppose.

At any rate, he offers no ardent opposition to the change of programme, and the bridegroom who stands at the altar with Lily is the one who won her as a landscape painter after all.

THE END.

me and talked of 'poverty
and the constant strife and
your life,' when all the time
rich nobleman, and did not
strife and endeavour meant.
that time have you been "tr
you been honest and generou
in my way so constantly?"

"Yes, I have," he says flue
this, at least, I have been
every noble instinct that I ha
to save you, Lily, from a fat
from, gorgeously as it is
jewelled. Be true now! Tel
this contemplated marriage
to you as it is."

"Mrs and the Miss Sam
Elinor's little fat page annou
plump and unwieldy short wo
mahogany-coloured eyes, that lo
fully at Lily, waddles into th
lowed by a couple of thin, tig

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THE REASON WHY.

CHAPTER I.

ST PETER'S TIDE.

"WHO is she?"

"Where does she come from?"

"Where does she live now?"

"Staying with some of the gentry round, I s'pose!"

"No! biding alone at that cottage midway up the cliff."

"Well, it don't look well, it don't, and I never heard such a thing in my life. How are we to know if she's maid, wife, or widow?"

"Such assurance! walking about as if the place belonged to her, and not a soul here able to give her a name."

"A fine *figure* of a girl, surely."

"Yes, Mr Trejellis, that's just what all you men think of, and nothing else, never a thought to what's *inside* the figure; fine feathers make fine birds, let me tell you, and there's many a one here would look quite as well as this young madam, if they had her gown on."

"Gown? Man's coat, I call it."

"Ah, well! Up country they *do* strange things and *wear* strange things."

"It becomes her mightily, whether it's a woman's gown or a man's coat."

"'If thy eye offends thee, pluck it out and cast it into the fire," we are told, Mr Trejellis; and *thine* eye offends when it goes roving after this young woman and her garments. At your time of life, too! it don't look well, that it don't."

These, and divers other remarks, all of them more or less of an uncomplimentary nature, are made about a young lady in a well-fitting brown Newmarket, as she strolls, slowly and alone, up and down the cliff terrace and paths, and among the throng who are keeping holiday to-day in the fishing village of Porthhallow.

Houses, many of them fairly decked with flags, rise in rows; and are spotted about singly on the cliffs that rise on either side of the little harbour, which runs up into the heart of the place. They are all of the cottage order, these houses; but many of them are the summer quarters of the families of the neighbouring gentry, and some are advertised as "superior sea-side lodgings." But whatever they are, or are called, they are singularly alike in the matter of breezy cleanliness.

Porthhallow lives and has its being by fish alone. Stately ships go by in the distance,

but their haven is under another hill than the heights which crown Porthhallow. But the little harbour is constantly alive with a fleet of fishing smacks, and trawlers, and lobster boats, and on sunny days the ruddy brown nets and the blue of the fishermen's clothes make satisfactory bits of colour as they respectively hang and loll about upon the grey rocks and chalky cliffs.

To-day, of all days in the year, is the time to see Porthhallow in its glory. It is St Peter's Tide, and it falls on the twenty-ninth day of sultry, leafy June, just at that season when summer is in its richest, most luxurious fulness and pride. There is no fear to-day that the five hundred school children of the Methodist persuasion who are parading the village in their go-to-meeting-best, will get sodden by rain, which always seems to be "wetter" in Cornwall than elsewhere. The sun is blazing out ungrudgingly from a sky that is of so

warm a grey it may *almost* be said to be blue, and the sea accepts the sky's suggestion with its accustomed ready grace, and gives back Heaven's own blue with zeal and fidelity.

Down on the quay on the north side of the harbour there assembled a number of caravans and shows, containing wax-works, fat women and a fatter boy, conjurors, Aunt Sallys on a new and improved plan, rifle-shooting booths, and other means of improving the mind and exercising the body. Towards this part of the village the young lady in the well-planned Newmarket presently wends her way.

She marches through the crowd like one who is accustomed to have her way cleared for her, and something in the air the band (a brass one from Falmouth Town) is playing inspires her to step with a grander firmer tread than usual.

How surely and steadily the pretty well-

shod little feet come down on the uneven ground to the tune of "The Reason Why," and as she prances along she hums the words which are born for the air:—

"A good sword and a trusty hand,
A gallant heart and true,
King James's men shall understand
What Cornish men can do."

"How *delicious* to have the right to sing the vaunt," she says, checking her musical hum, and lapsing into speech. "I *wish* King James was alive now, making a tyrant of himself to Tre, Pol, or Pen. Wouldn't I go in for one or other of their factions, or for one and all; but the period is tame, and all the wildness that gets into my life will be put into it by myself.

"And have they scorned Tre, Pol, and Pen?
And shall Trelawney die?
Then twenty thousand Cornish men
Will know the reason why."

Utterly regardless of the observant crowd about her, she sings this once again in her resonant tones, and the tide of local opinion sets in strongly against her.

"A young lady like her to go growling about like that," they say, in accents of the strongest reprobation, as, unconscious of their condemnatory dictum, she pushes her way to the entrance of the show in which the "fattest boy of his age (six years) in England or the United States" is advertised to appear.

He sits on an elevated chair at the far end of the booth, with a big shawl pinned round his bigger shoulders. His head has fallen back, his eyes are closed, he is overcome by heat and fat. The girl's blue eyes have been full of languid indifference up to the present moment, but they light up with suddenly-aroused scorn and anger as they glance rapidly from the obese child to the shrewish-looking woman

who exhibits him and proclaims aloud the wondrous story of his unrivalled fat.

"It's horrible, and disgusting, and cruel," the girl says, in a ringingly clear voice penetrating every corner of the booth. "How shamefully you must stuff him. What does he eat?"

"The same as your children do, my lady," the woman replies sulkily and saucily; but the young lady who has brought the rebuff upon herself is not one whit angered or abashed by it.

"I have no children," she laughs; and then the woman's eyes fall for a moment upon the little hand, from which the tan Seude Mousquetaire glove has just been removed, and seeing no ring there, she says hastily,—

"Beg your pardon, miss; I'm sure I didn't mean no offence. You seem so cool-like, that I thought you must be a married lady; and I get that hot and

flustered with the questions that are asked about this here child; people giving me the lie about his age—"

"Is he your own child?" the girl asks; and the show-woman says testily,—

"No, he ain't! Are you satisfied now? Walk in, ladies and gentlemen, and see the young giant who is now about to walk down the platform and shake hands with them as wish it."

The young porpoise is, with a mighty effort on his own part, and much muscular aid from the woman, hoisted on to his large feet, from which rise two fleshy pedestals of elephantine proportions, on which he totteringly wobbles as he walks down the plank.

"You're not a child of six! You're a bloated dwarf of sixteen!" the young lady says reproachfully, as the interesting youth terminates his promenade and offers his hand to her before he reseats himself.

"How can I tell when I was born?" the young monster says complainingly. "How should I know? Children doesn't know when they was born? How should they?"

"That's not the speech of a child of six," the young woman says decisively, and then she walks out of the booth, followed by scowls from the show man and woman, and the subject of several depreciatory remarks from the audience, who dislike her for having cast a doubt on the genuineness of the repulsive combination of extreme youth and excessive fat on which they have been gloating.

"Hoity-toity! If we was Queen Victoria in her golden crown, we couldn't give ourselves bigger airs of knowing better than the rest of folks," one of the women, whose previous comments on the strange young lady have been set down, says, scoffingly, as the girl, with a parting per-

ceptive glance around, steps through the doorway.

"The young 'umman speaks out like a truthful young 'umman!" Mr Trejellis put in, with the air of a man who is determined to dare the worst that may be done to help in the good cause of befriending a female in distress.

"That's Mr Trejellis all over!" the first speaker cries mockingly; "because a bold-faced jig comes and casts doubts on what *we* was glad to see and believe in, he calls her 'truthful,' and thinks the ground isn't good enough for her to walk on;" and the widow Lakin, who is a well-to-do woman, keeping the best general shop in Porthhallow, flumps away from the group as she says this, darting a look full of ire at the offending Trejellis, whom she intends to take as her honoured second.

"She has a pretty smile," Trejellis says, standing to his guns manfully; whereat

a coquettish young thing of forty or thereabouts, who trades successfully as a laundress on the innate love of cleanliness in the breasts of the neighbouring gentry, and who always has her eye on Mr Trejellis in the absence of the favoured widow Lakin, exclaims,—

"Pretty smile, indeed! I got frowns enough from her, I can tell you, when I took home her morning gowns last night—beautiful fine white India muslin, trimmed with yards upon yards of real piller lace; and I'd got them up like pictures; but young miss she wasn't half pleased with them, and told me she'd pay double gladly to have them sent home fit to put on."

"She've plenty of money to spend, they do tell," another woman puts in, and then the whisper goes round that Miss Sutherland—that is her name, on the laundress's authority—has gone into the waxworks,

and a general move in the direction of the waxworks on the part of the Porthallowites is the result.

There are three recesses—or "carriages," as they are technically called—in this caravan; and in these respectively are shown three groups of life-sized wax figures, each one of whom jerks his or her head, and waves his or her hand, spasmodically at intervals of from half-a-minute to a minute.

The group on whose artistic merits and life-like beauties the showman is expatiating when Miss Sutherland enters, is the Players' Scene from "Hamlet." A fair, fat Ophelia simpers sympathetically over a Hamlet whose features are cast in the familiar Irving mould, and whose head moves more freely and incessantly than those of his fellow-puppets. The first words Miss Sutherland catches rouses her argumentative and vivacious interests at once.

"This, ladies and gentlemen," says the showman, "is allowed by competent judges in Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States, to be by far the most bootiful and life-like representation from ancient English history which has ever been put before the public. 'Ere you see 'Amlet, Prince of Denmark, a-watching of his uncle, while that wicked suvvering is a-gazing at a poison scene which 'Amlet, his nephew, 'as specially prepared to catch the conscience of the king; 'ere, on the left behind 'Amlet's 'ed, you see Ophelia, one of the nicest young ladies that ever came nigh to sitting upon the throne with 'Amlet, Prince of Denmark. Opposite to her is Queen Gertrude, who was no better than she ought to be all through her wicked life, 'aving 'eartlessly married 'er first 'usbing's brother, which was likewise the murderer of her first 'usbing, as all who read English 'istory can tell. The immortal Shakespeare have

wrote the story in its present beautiful form from its foundation in English 'istory, which, of course, is well known to all you eddicated ladies and gentlemen here present."

"It hasn't anything to do with English history," Miss Sutherland says, half aloud, to herself; but the showman hears her, and resents her revision of his text.

"The immortal Shakespeare," he proceeds, in a louder and more defiant voice, "has told us that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing,' and so it is, ladies and gentlemen, when it leads the young into saying that which is not right and true. When I tell you that this is a representation of one of the most 'eart-rending scenes in English history, I tell you what every lady and gentleman and schoolboy and girl do know theirselves; and when I hear it stated that what I say is not right, I feels sorry for other people's ignorance, and go on with my lecture, that's all."

"The young lady knows what she's telling about for all *he* says," the bold Mr Trejellis says, over his shoulder, to his widowed friend, whose mind is already aflame with jealousy.

"The young lady's a proud piece of goods, and fond of making mischief for mischief's sake, I should say," Mrs Lakin retorts; for, with her usual ill-luck in such matters, Mabel Sutherland has already crossed Mrs Lakin's hopes and plans. For Mr Trejellis is a horse-dealer, and since they have been stalking Miss Sutherland through the fair this afternoon, it has come to Mrs Lakin's knowledge that the cob and four-wheeled chaise which she has designed for herself, as soon as she can compass her honourable end and make herself Mrs Trejellis, has already caught the eye and won the favourable attention of the strange young lady.

"And Mr Trejellis is that weak, he'll let

her have it," the widow says, bitterly, to her laundress friend and rival.

"Trust him to know what he's about," the latter lady says reassuringly. "If she isn't willing to pay Mr Trejellis's price, Mr Trejellis as likes as not will keep it agin the day he marries and has a wife to want it."

This remark falls like oil on troubled waters, for more reasons than one. In the first place, before everything else, it is a tacit recognition of Mrs Lakin's claim on the coveted Trejellis, and, in the second place, it is gratifying to the widow to see that her rival (who, in her washing capacity, is useful to her) is so far resigned to the inevitable as to speak with becoming submission of the probability of another than herself sharing the fortunes and pony-chaise of the all-conquering horse-dealer. Still, Mrs Lakin feels that it will be indecorous to triumph too openly, so she

merely shakes her head, and says drawlingly,—

"Ah, mum, we none of us may live to see the day when Mr Trejellis will settle down sensibly and comfortably with a wife of his own to look after his comforts and take care of him, as should be taken of such a man. We mayn't live to see that day, Mrs Davey, neither you nor I, unless Mr Trejellis bestirs himself. We're none of us as young as we were, he including."

The latter part of this speech is well aimed to fall right into the ears of the well-loved but much harassed Trejellis, who is widely suspected of not being as impatient and eager to name the happy day as is the buxom general dealer. Challenged thus directly, however, he speaks up like a man, with a faint attempt to be humorous under depressing circumstances.

"That's not handsome of you, Mrs

Lakin, to talk of my not bestirring myself. I was up this morning at five o'clock out on the bay cob, and he was as fresh as paint, and bestirred me pretty sharply, I can tell you."

"We was speaking of a much more serious matter than bay colts," Mrs Davey says severely.

She realises that her own chance is gone, and so is inclined to give a friendly shove in the direction of wedlock to her friend, the widow Lakin.

"We were speaking of our wedding-day, Mr Trejellis," Mrs Lakin says buoyantly, staking her all on the hazard of a die, and feeling wofully frightened that she may lose it. But Trejellis, who is one of the pluckiest rough-riders in the West of England, is as timid as a fawn where women and weddings are concerned. Accordingly, now he lets himself lapse into sheepish incapability, and in this state

the day is named for him with prompt decision by Mrs Lakin.

"And if I was you, Trejellis," she says, with affectionate familiarity, "I'd see about putting the house in order at once, and making room for my bit of furniture; no one in Porthhallow has kept a better-looking home than I have all these years I've been lone, and I shall take care that the same words shall be spoke about your house when I'm its missus; and as for that pony-shay — lor'! it have been the wish of my heart ever since I were a girl, and father lived coachman to Mr Trelawney, that I might have one of my own."

Lives there a man with soul so dead as to refuse the *first* implied request of his bride elect? If there does exist such a callous creature, Mr Trejellis is not the man! Before they go home to the well-spread tea-table in the large room facing the sea, by the side of Mrs Lakin's "general

store for drapery and groceries," that excellent woman has performed the friendly office for herself of getting the horse-dealer to promise to "disappoint Miss Sutherland and keep the pony-shay."

So "Queen Mab," as she has been called in her own family from the day of her birth, goes home to her cottage mid-way up the cliff with the fallacious hope in her mind, that for a moderate sum she is to become the possessor of a fast, well-stepping cob, who will carry her constantly far beyond the confines of Porthhallow.

It is a unique little establishment, this over which she presides. An old man who has passed "his four score and ten," as he tells her, and whom she found sitting in the gloom of a coal and rubbish house on the day of her arrival, lurks about the yard from the dawn to the gloaming, and goes on light errands to the village when the thing sent for is not needed soon. And a

young girl of twenty, untrained in the paths of servitude, and indigenous to the Porthhallow soil, does what is technically called the "rough" housework. The "finer" sort is left to time and chance to get itself done, and meantime Mabel Sutherland is happy, after a fashion, in this disordered life.

Her little drawing-room, whose big bay window commands the sea, is comfortably furnished in a clean conventional way that does not bear a trace of Miss Sutherland's own individuality, but still the aspect of the room is pretty, on the whole, for she has grouped wild-flowers, marsh daisies, and ferns about in every part of it, and flowers never fail to refine. Her work-basket stands open on a table by the side of the sofa, a pretty toy crammed full of crewels and embroidered silks, and a few books are scattered about. Still the room lacks that look of being lived in and loved, which a

room ought to have when it has the heart of its owner in it.

As she takes off her hat and seats herself by the window with the warm light of an afternoon in glowing June falling full upon her, she looks so fair a thing that it is a pity not to paint her at once in words.

But, unfortunately, no words can paint her. So all that shall be said is this: her bright hair is full of the golden glory of the sun, and her deep grey eyes are the sweetest ever seen. Her brow can frown !—her nose is delicately tilted and a trifle impertinent, and her mouth is one of those pure and tender mouths from which a wise man would wish his children to learn speech and sympathy. The lips are rather compressed, for now she is tired and is thinking.

"Will they ever look for a girl who has run away from riches and a coronet, or shall I be let live on and die out forgotten?"

CHAPTER II.

AN ORNAMENT TO THE BRITISH PEERAGE.

THE Traffords' house on the Bayswater side of the park is one of the brightest and pleasantest in that bright and pleasant locality. But on this same twenty-ninth of June on which Miss Mabel Sutherland has made her first appearance before this public, the Traffords' house is the abode of deepest gloom and captious unquiet.

There is a little dinner on for to-night. A little unpretentious, exquisitely ordered and arranged dinner that has been planned for a month, and perfected bit by bit during each one of the intervening days. It is a

dinner given by Mr Trafford, the eminent Stock Exchange man, to eight or ten men who compose the council of a Limited Liability Bank in which he is a large shareholder.

Everything has gone smoothly and well up to a certain point. Unfortunately for Mr Trafford, everything nice is in season, so he cannot give his honoured guests salmon at half-a-guinea, and grapes at thirty shillings a-pound. But he soothes himself with the reflection that he has paid more for his pine-apples and Egyptian quail than any other man of his acquaintance would be both able and willing to pay. As for his wines! calumny itself can find nothing to hint against them. A fine block of ice, shaped like Cleopatra's Needle, and scooped out in the middle, occupies the place of honour in the centre of the table, and in the scooped-out place water-lilies are arranged, with a bulrush or two to bear them company.

Mrs Trafford has done her best to make the board worthy of the moneyed men who are to sit at it. But she has done it with a heavy heart! For the one on whom she relied to help her through the onerous duties of hostess-ship to millionaires has gone away secretly, and Mrs Trafford's heart is sore about her.

Presently, an hour earlier than usual, Mr Trafford comes back from the City, and his first words were,—

"Heard anything of Mabel yet? You don't tell me, Sarah, that the girl has not yet been heard of?"

"I do tell you so, Mr Trafford, with more sorrow than dear Mab has ever caused me before," Sarah, his wife, replies mournfully; and he, muttering something which may be either maledictory or benedictory (he is apt to bale out both blessings and curses freely), stalks upstairs, and prepares to meet his coming guests in a

frilled shirt that recalls the glorious days of the First Gentleman in Europe to the mind's eye of the beholder.

By-and-by, when he has performed his toilet duties thoroughly, but not quite to his own satisfaction,—for do what he will in the way of dress, he can never make himself look a distinguished gentleman,—he goes into his wife's room, and finds her ready, waiting for his verdict on her appearance.

She is a well-looking, but not pretty or handsome woman, of fifty or thereabouts, dressed in a way that is quite consistent with her age and position. Her dark hair streaked with grey is partially covered by a rich Mechlin lace cap. Her dress is one of those deft combinations of velvet and satin and Spanish lace, which deprive black of all sombreness. Her face is fair and unwrinkled, rather sad in its expression,—for sad and anxious thoughts are her portion just now;

in spite of the sumptuous air of plenty and prosperity which is around.

Handsome as she is looking, and altogether pleasant and agreeable as is her aspect, her husband looks at her discontentedly.

"You have forgotten something, Sarah," he says rather sternly. "I wish your memory was better, my dear."

"My memory serves me only too well, Robert," she says quietly. "What do you think I have forgotten now?"

"To put on those diamonds."

"Mabel's diamonds?"

"Don't try to thwart and insult me, madam!" he cries gustily. "The diamonds I meant for Mabel once, and which I have given to you now. Why are you not wearing them?"

"I am not going to appropriate anything which belongs to my dear girl."

"By Heaven! if you don't wear them to-night I shall suspect you of knowing

that the girl has stolen them," he roars out in a rage, and it rather vexes him the more when Mrs Trafford answers,—

"I will show them to you in their cases if you like: if Mabel had taken them away it would have been no robbery; you gave them to her as distinctly as you gave her the watch and a hundred other trifles; you can't confiscate them simply because she won't make a miserable marriage to please you."

"A miserable marriage! Hear the woman! Hear the fool!" he says, appealing to empty space to take heed of her madness. "It might have been a miserable marriage for the Earl of Wokington to be tied to a stuck-up, detestable, vain, idle peacock of a girl who is capable of committing any wickedness in an ungovernable fit of temper; but, as far as she is concerned, it was far too good a marriage for such a—"

"Shame on you, Robert, to speak so of your dead sister's child," his wife interrupts, with a degree of dignity that irritates him intensely, chiefly because he cannot emulate it.

"Don't talk nonsense, and put on those diamonds without any more humbug. I want Lord Wokington to see them."

"They will not be displayed by me," she says resolutely, and then she walks down to receive her guests, followed by her husband, who keeps up a rambling fire of grumbling.

The fact is that there are more unpleasant things immediately before Mr Trafford than are dreamt of in his wife's philosophy. Not the least of these is the reflection that when Lord Wokington comes, he (Mr Trafford) will be compelled to tell that powerful nobleman that Miss Sutherland—the bride he has proposed

for and coveted—has run away rather than meet him.

As for what the effect of this communication will be on Lord Wokington, and on the bank which is chiefly bolstered up by his money, the harassed Mr Trafford does not dare to think.

"Shouldn't wonder if Wokington walks out of the house at once when he hears how he has been tricked by that vile girl," Mr Trafford mutters, as the first carriage rolls up to the door, and, cautiously peeping out through the curtains, he discovers that the great Earl is the earliest guest.

"Mabel never tricked him; she refused him decidedly, and he had no right to take your promise to force on the match," Mrs Trafford is saying, when the door is thrown open, and the butler unctuously announces—

"The Earl of Wokington."

He is a tall, stout man, of fifty-three or four, dyed and dressed to look fifteen years younger. His features are, or rather have been, handsome, but they are flabby and pallid now, and the intense black of his moustache and hair contrasts painfully with the whiteness of his cheeks and brow. His eyes are good, large, dark, and bold, but his teeth when he smiles (and he smiles freely) have a cruel look, as if he were seeking something to devour.

He has a rather more *empresse* manner than is common with well-bred Englishmen. But for all that he is a distinguished-looking man, and many women have told him so!

Even as he returns his hostess's greeting, his eyes move impatiently round the room in search of the bright young beauty, Mabel Sutherland, who is promised to him. He has had an ugly reputation about women, for he is what he looks—a

vain, heartless, unprincipled, lusty old sinner; but he really intends to turn over a new leaf now, with the aid of Mabel's hand, and he longs to get into the new groove, and to hear Mabel's assurance that she will help him to run in it.

He cannot conceal his impatience to enact the *rôle* of "young lord lover" to a girl who has been spoken about and written about as one of the loveliest in London. So he asks at once,—

"I hope your niece, Miss Sutherland, is well? I hoped that she would have been here to receive my assurance of gratitude for the great honour she has done me in promising to be my wife."

The supreme moment has come, and poor Mr Trafford nearly expires in it.

"I am sorry to have to tell you that my niece has disappointed my fondest expectations, and nearly broken my heart,

by leaving my house with the most disgraceful, saucy, and—"

"Mr Hall, Mr Gifford, Mr Arlington, Mr Tripholm, and Mr Giles," shouts the butler, who hates the whole lot of them for coming together and giving him such a list of names to proclaim simultaneously.

The perplexed host is obliged to turn and greet these powerful guests with a smiling visage. As he does so, Lord Wokington addresses Mrs Trafford,—

"I hope my good friend Trafford is joking?" he says, with a snarl in his voice that is meant to remind her that there must be "no trifling with him, no evasion, no humbug of any sort!"

"About what?" she asks, with a quiet, simple, steady assertion of her own right to receive respect from him as a man, that staggers him for a moment.

At the end of that moment he recovers his normal arrogance, and says,—

"About his niece Mabel, my betrothed, having gone away without beat of drum."

"Pardon me, Lord Wokington, she is not your betrothed, nor has she ever given you the right to speak of her as such," Mrs Trafford says, with just so much spirit and temper as becomes her under the circumstances. Whereupon Lord Wokington tries to remember all that is due to him, and fails to appear as anything but a mystified man after all, and Mrs Trafford, perfectly mistress of the situation, though her blood is boiling, turns to meet her other guests.

Later in the evening there is a sort of explanation between the two—gentlemen!

"All I can say to you is this," Mr Trafford says nervously, "this day week when I came home, after seeing you, I told Mabel that you had done her the honour of repeating your offer, and that I had pledged her credit and my own

that she would accept it. I was very honest and outspoken with her, and she has rewarded me basely. Two days after, when I came from the city, I found my wife in tears, and the girl gone."

"Gone! with whom? Who's the fellow?" Lord Wokington cries in an ecstasy, hoping that at last the Fates are going to be good enough to allow him the opportunity of saying that he is going to fight a duel.

"Gone away solitarily, alone and unprotected, I'm sorry to say," Mr Trafford answers nervously.

"Gad, man! you oughtn't to say you're sorry she's gone off alone," Lord Wokington says, drawing his big fat frame out to its utmost height, and striving to be noble and magnanimous against the dictates of his real lower nature. "I—"

"Diamonds are a glut in the market just now, Trafford. Lady Glaceton's are advertised, and that means that they're

gone already, and that these advertised now are paste. You promised us a sight of Miss Sutherland's to-night—where are they ?"

The speaker is one of the newest men in the bank, he is also one of the richest and touchiest, therefore one whom Mr Trafford can least afford to offend.

"I am more than sorry to tell you, Mr Hall, that my niece not being here to-night, the jewels cannot be shown," he says tremulously.

Mr Hall bursts into an important, rich laugh,—

"Nonsense, man, any other block will do to exhibit them on; let's see the diamonds," Mr Hall persists, and again Mr Trafford stammeringly proclaims his inability to show them, at the same time looking appealingly at his wife in the vain hope that she will relent, and permit him to do so without further delay.

"I should put the matter in the hands of the police," Mr Hall says presently, when all the facts concerning his niece's disappearance that are known to Mr Trafford have leaked out.

"I have no fears for Miss Sutherland's safety and well-being," Mrs Trafford says calmly.

"Then you know where she is, and knowing where she is, why the devil don't you say so?" Lord Wokington bawls out in the tones he is accustomed to use towards those whom he considers his inferiors. In fact, as may be perceived even on this brief acquaintance, fate and fortune had made him a nobleman, but nature has failed to make him a gentleman.

"I do *not* know where Miss Sutherland is, but for the sake of silencing gossip I will tell you this much: she has gone away with my knowledge and consent, and wherever

she may be, she is leading an honourable and good life."

Mrs Trafford addresses the company generally in saying this, and sedulously avoids glancing in Lord Wokington's direction.

"I shall insist on a full explanation of this—this d—d unpleasant affair in a day or two, Trafford," Lord Wokington cries furiously. "It's given out in the society journals to-day that my marriage with Miss Sutherland is arranged for July. Am I a man to be made a fool off in the eyes of the world? Am I a man, I ask you, to be balked by a headstrong girl? Order your wife to tell you all she knows about this disgraceful business. Compel her to submit to your wishes in this matter, unless you are a weaker-spirited fellow than I take you to be."

"The only disgraceful part of this business with which I am acquainted, Lord Wokington, is the promise you cajoled Miss

Sutherland's natural guardian to give as to her marriage with you, after she had definitely told you that she could not be your wife."

"It's all very well for you to defy me, Mrs Trafford," his lordship sneers, in an unlordly way; "but the view I shall take, and the view that shall be taken by the world, is that your niece had forfeited her right to be the wife of an honest man before she ran away."

Mrs Trafford rises with such stately wrath that her husband trembles and cowers, and even Lord Wokington feels that he has gone too far.

With her hand on the bell, she pauses, and speaks,—

"Mr Trafford, will you order the man who has maligned and shamefully insulted your sister's daughter out of your house, or will you compel me to ring and tell my servants to do it?"

"For mercy's sake, Sarah—"

"No hesitation. Which shall it be?"

"Lord Wokington, I hope you feel that I have no part in this outrageous conduct," Mr Trafford cries abjectly, as he follows Lord Wokington, who is stamping and almost roaring with passion, out of the room.

But he gets nothing by his pacific policy, for, as Lord Wokington seats himself in his carriage, he shouts out,—

"Look to yourself, Mr Trafford! Your precious wife and niece have done a nice day's work for you. To-morrow morning I withdraw the whole of my capital from the bank. Look to yourself."

"By Heaven, I am a ruined man!" Mr Trafford ejaculates, as soon as he is alone with his wife.

Then he shakes his fist in her face, and there is no peace between the pair for the rest of this night.

"I only did the duty you had forgotten to your niece in rebuking that vile man as I did," Mrs Trafford says determinately. "Could I stay silent and hear the dear child, who has been to us as a daughter, traduced? Whatever vengeance Lord Wokington may take will only touch your purse, not your honour."

But this reflection, which is designed to soothe and comfort, fails of its effect, for the reason that his purse is nearer to Mr Trafford's heart than aught else in this world.

Lord Wokington carries out his threat about the money. He withdraws the whole of his capital from the bank, and induces such a run on it as causes it to stop payment, and ruin many of the men who are concerned in it. But, to his disgust, Mr Trafford does not seem to suffer materially by this. In fact, Mr Trafford has many irons in the fire, and though the bank busi-

ness has hit him hard, he can keep his head well above water.

But his other threat about ruining Miss Sutherland's reputation in the world he does not carry out, for the following reasons :—

In the first place, he is not a member of any of the best clubs, not because he is a wicked man, but because he boasts vulgarly of his wickedness. And, in the second place, when he begins to sneeringly insinuate foul things of Mabel to his nephew and heir, whom he hates, that young gentleman pulls him up with the words :—

"None of that about Miss Sutherland, please ; I know two men who will horse-whip you in the street if you say it again."

"Who are they, pray ?" his lordship asks malignantly, and the young fellow, though he knows he risks his allowance by saying it, replies,—

"Frank Arbuthnot is one—and *I* am the other, my lord."

"*You!* what the devil have *you* to do with the girl, sir?"

"Only that, some day or other, Arbuthnot hopes to make her his wife, and I'll not hear the wife of my friend slandered!"

"You're a confounded impertinent puppy," Lord Wokington roars, but he does not say another word against Miss Sutherland.

A few words must be said about Lord Wokington's nephew and heir-presumptive, Valentine Romilly, before Porthhallow and Mabel Sutherland are revisited.

The only son of Lord Wokington's only brother, who died in the boy's infancy, Val has been brought up with the belief that the title, and all that appertains to it, will eventually be his. But, in spite of this belief, there is neither presumption nor undue elation in his heart about the matter when he thinks of it. Nor is there any

truckling in his manner to his potent relative, who has failed utterly to win either affection or respect from the high-couraged, independent-spirited young fellow.

"Whatever you do, try and conciliate your uncle," is the advice that has been dinned into his ears by his mother from his babyhood. But whenever conciliating his uncle has involved anything like truckling under, Lord Wokington has always been left unconciliated.

That this ornament of the British peerage hates the man who must succeed him in the unalterable order of things, unless he (Lord Wokington) has a son, is perhaps not altogether unnatural, when one remembers what manner of man Lord Wokington is; and it has been the fondest wish of that nobleman's heart to keep Mabel Sutherland and his nephew apart. But "Man proposes!"

CHAPTER III.

THE POLLINGS OF POLLINGTON.

WHEN Mrs Trafford asserted that wherever her niece was, she was leading an honourable and good life, she spoke words of the strictest truth. She might have added, indeed, that Mabel was leading a life of ceaseless industry.

Known as a clever and accomplished girl in society, it was only when Mabel conceived the daring scheme of running away from the uncle who was persecuting her to marry a man she loathed with a fulness of loathing which words are inadequate to describe, that she also conceived the idea of turning one of her accomplishments to account as a means of subsistence.

Now, down here on the grand Cornish coast, the girl is working hard with brush and pencil, striving honestly and enthusiastically to put the rugged cliffs and the rolling waves, the floating sea-gulls and the picturesque fishing smacks, vividly on canvas. She has the real artist soul. A keen appreciation of the beautiful, and an intense desire to reproduce it; and this not for the sake of what it will bring, but for the sake of what it is.

Not but that, in the need there is for her to take thought for the morrow, the question of what it will bring will arise sometimes. For Mabel Sutherland, in declaring for freedom and independence, has taken to heart the truth that freedom and independence attained in the way she has attained it, means poverty, absolute and entire, or the oft-quoted modest competence and hard work.

Not that living by means of the art that

is a passion with her is "hard" work, in one sense, to Miss Sutherland. Still she knows that in the business of vending her works, she will have to encounter many a rebuff and disappointment, many a discouraging sneer, many a barely-veiled insult. In pursuance of "the art" which is her purpose in life, Mabel Sutherland can forget—or rather can ignore—all these disagreeables. Still, unconsciously, they influence and sometimes act as deterrents.

On fine, fair days, the hours glide by swiftly for Mabel at Porthhallow, as she sits on some free headland and makes studies of the coast or the waves. But on wet, murky days, when the wind is moaning or roaring as it never moans and roars save by the sea, when the light in the room which she has turned into a studio is too dull for her to distinguish colour, when the sea-gulls swoop low over the restless waves in their warning flight, when the

only sign of humanity she sees is in the shape of a wet and bedraggled pedestrian passing along under her window—when all these things are, then Mabel nearly admits to herself that the days at Porthhallow are rather long.

Not but that Miss Sutherland finds plenty of *divertissement*, after all — even on the days which open most gloomily. Some beggar is sure to come to her door, whatever the weather, with a canting tale, which in the majority of cases suggests a story to her — and a story to the artist-mind inevitably suggests a picture. Then, again, after she has resided among them long enough for them to come to the decision that she is neither mad, bad, nor dangerous, a few families from the far-off straggling villages around cautiously call upon her, and give her to understand that she may show herself at their village "art and industrial" *fêtes* and exhibitions, and exhibit

her pictures at the same without fear or reproach.

The family to whom, in the vernacular, she "fangs" to most, lives a short mile from Mabel's cottage under the cliff, and is known far and wide as the Pollings of Pollington.

The first syllable of their name being so essentially the right thing in the right place in the land of Tre, Pol, and Pen, Mabel responds to their advances from the force of social local feeling at first. But, speedily realising their worth and integrity, she comes to regard their name as a minor matter entirely, merely a trifle compared with the worthy merits of those who bear it.

Pollington itself is a dear, old-world, substantial house, that might fairly have been called a castle, had those who erected or inhabited it first been more ambitious or vain-glorious than they were. Standing well up on a bold headland, belted in on

three sides with trees, it shows a dauntless battlemented front to the wide Atlantic, and looks in its granite strength as if the fiercest storm that ever raged from off the wild ocean would be powerless to shake it.

At present it is occupied by some good specimens of the old race, who have held it through fair and heavy weather for many generations.

The "Squire," as he is always called, is an old man now—a contemporary of that gallant Trelawney who was out with Byron and Shelley in Greece, and whose memoirs of the two great poets are—or ought to be—familiar to every Cornish man or woman who can read. But, though a contemporary of "handsome Trelawney's," Squire Polling is by many years the younger man.

A capital specimen of a hardy, wiry, muscular Cornishman, the Squire at seventy is a fair match for the majority of men at sixty in most physical and mental exercises.

To see him after the hounds is inspiring—a sight to make other old men, who have hunting-blood in them, young again. And to see him at the head of his table any night "after a good day," is to see one of the most fascinating, agreeable, and vivacious of hosts.

Later on, to see him at family prayers, surrounded by his children and retainers, is to see a perfect picture of a devout old man.

Yet, after all, Squire Polling has a failing that frequently makes life a howling wilderness to those around him, and this failing is a temper which he either does not or cannot govern.

At any unexpected moment, and from no cause that is visible to the bodily or mental vision of the beholder, this demon of overwhelming fury is liable to take possession of the Squire. The only thing to do on these occasions is either to put on all canvas and sail out of his vicinity, or "round

upon him," as schoolboys say, and fall into an ungovernable fury too.

His wife died of insufficient canvas for the purpose long years ago, and those that remain with him at the present moment breast the storms, as a rule, and come safely into the harbour of family peace and affection.

The nominal mistress of the house is his only daughter Edith, a firm, gentle, graceful girl of twenty-two or three, with a figure like a willow-wand, and a face like a wild rose. Under her discreet and gentle rule, life at Pollington would revolve on well-oiled wheels, were it not for the well-intentioned, but unceasing and voluble interference of the Squire's youngest sister, a lady more than twenty years younger than himself.

Aunt Nellie—as Miss Elinor Polling is always called—is cast in a similar mould, both physically and mentally, to that in

which nature has formed her eldest brother. She has the same fine physique, the same generous heart, the same genial, hospitable manner, and—very much the same irascibility of temper.

The eldest son, Godolphin Polling, is away serving with his regiment in India. The second son, Shelley (named so by the request of his godfather, that same Trelawney who has been just mentioned, after his poet friend), stays at Pollington, and farms the home-farm.

Around Shelley Polling the interest centres strongly now, for it is on the cards that he may shortly take the most momentous step in a man's life—namely, marry.

When Mabel Sutherland first becomes acquainted with the Pollings they are anticipating a first visit from Shelley's *fiancée*, and speculations as to what she will be like, and what she will do, and how she will like

them, and (far more important consideration !) how they will like her, are rife in the family circle.

Into these Mabel flings herself heartily, as she would into the joys, and woes, and expectations—the hopes, fears, and doubts —of a Fiji Islander, a Turk, or a Hottentot.

One morning the two Miss Pollings—the aunt and niece—arrive at Miss Sutherland's door in a state of perturbation. They are sufficiently intimate by this time to come into the girl's studio without her feeling called upon to cease from painting, or to feel them to be a disturbing influence.

"Such news!" Edith cries out gladly. "Mr Romilly, an old college friend of Godolphin's, has written to say business calls him to Penzance, and he should like to spend a few days at Pollington if it is quite convenient to papa. Of *course* it's quite convenient to papa to receive any friend of Godolphin's at any time, and he used to say

Val Romilly was such a splendid fellow! Isn't it too lovely, Miss Sutherland?"

Mabel is painting away steadily, but the name of her old lover's young nephew, thus unexpectedly uttered, makes the colour vary in her face, though she has never seen the mentioned man. Fortunately for her, she is not called upon to answer Miss Polling's remark at once, for Aunt Nellie takes up the parable.

"Too lovely! my dear Edith. I wonder you talk such nonsense, when you know, as well as I can tell you, that on Thursday next Miss Field is coming to be introduced to the family; so inconvenient and disagreeable, you see, Miss Sutherland, for a stranger to be visiting at Pollington at the same time as the young lady my nephew Shelley is engaged to."

"No!" Mabel says, shaking her head vigorously, in dissent with this proposition; "I don't see how one young man the more,

at a huge place like Pollington, can interfere with the comfort of a young lady visitor."

The truth is, Mabel is desperately desirous, in the innermost recesses of her heart, to see the nephew and heir of the man who is wanting to marry her. By all the means in her power will she strengthen the younger Miss Polling's wish to have him for a guest, even at the cost of vexing the soul of the elder one.

"Room! room! of course there's room at Pollington for two dozen guests, even if they all took single beds—and bed-linen, too, in abundance for the matter of that. Your poor mother, Edith, wasn't much of a housekeeper when she first came to Pollington; but I'll do her the justice to say she soon fell into our ways, and one of the ways of the Pollings' always has been to have good stores of *everything*."

"I don't see the use of having a good

store of things if you don't use them," Mabel says, stepping back a pace or two from her easel to see whether or not that slight shiver, which passed through her frame when she first heard Val Romilly's name, has had an ill effect on her picture.

"Use them! Things are used freely enough at Pollington, I can assure you, Miss Sutherland," the spinster aunt says proudly. "*Too* freely, I'm inclined to think sometimes, for young people are not as thoughtful and careful as they might be, and as their elders have been before them; but there's a time and a season for all things, and I feel that this is *not* the time and season for a handsome, fashionable young man—such as I've heard this Mr Romilly is—to be visiting at Pollington."

The good, well-loved, well-meaning, peppery maiden aunt has worked herself into a state of quivering wrath by her own words. Her niece Edith, having served a long

apprenticeship to this trial by tongue, diplomatically keeps silence. But Mabel, who is a little weary of this rather prolix eloquence, says coolly,—

"Is Miss Field a Venus in whose vicinity there is peril to all men, that you anticipate Mr Romilly will forget friendship, honour, and everything else, and turn out 'dangerous,' simply because she is in the house with him?"

"No. I'm sure Aunt Nellie can't mean *that*," Edith says quickly. "Shelley is not a man to be fallen out of love with, and Flora Field is devoted to him, I know."

"Has your brother told you so?" Mabel asks sharply. "If he has, I hope he has added that he is equally devoted in return."

"Why?" Edith asks wonderingly.

In her simple faith, in all that appertains to the Pollings of Pollington there would be nothing at all extraordinary in the fact of a girl adoring either one of her brothers, and

proclaiming her adoration, even if he did not respond to it.

"Why! Because, if he didn't, I think it was rather mean of him to tell you that she *did*," Mabel laughs. "If I were her, I'd stimulate his placid regard by luring Mr Romilly into my net."

"Shelley wouldn't put up with that for a moment," his sister says decidedly.

"I'm sure I hope Shelley has too much regard for the family to submit to being trifled with in any way, however much he may be attached to the young lady," Aunt Nellie put in loftily.

But Mabel gurgles out a questioning laugh, and says,—

"Pooh! don't imagine that you know a bit what 'Shelley' would do under the circumstances; sisters and aunts never do; brothers' love affairs are sealed books to them; and as to his 'regard for the family' coming in the way of his doing and daring

anything for Miss Flora Field, cease from such vain imagining, Miss Polling, or you'll surely be disappointed!"

"Shelley will always be nice to me, I'm sure," Edith Polling says sweetly; and her aunt, seemingly aggrieved at this assurance being felt when she has expressed a doubt, becomes vociferous and unintelligible on the spot.

"Nonsense your talking, Edith; never heard such a thing in my life! 'Nice to you,' indeed! Who's Miss Flora Field, that, because he's going to marry her, a Polling shouldn't be 'nice' to all his own family?"

"But I said that he would be, aunt; didn't I, Miss Sutherland? I can't think why Aunt Nellie should imagine—"

"Imagine, indeed! I shall believe my own ears and my own senses while they last, and the Pollings never lose theirs very early in life," Aunt Nellie says, speaking as

if she were in a whirlwind of passion, but being in reality only affectionately desirous of making herself clearly understood.

"I think you both mean exactly the same thing, only you express yourselves rather differently," Mabel says, half laughing. "You both mean that Mr Shelley Polling is the finest fellow on the face of the earth, and that not even for the sake of Miss Flora Field—whom you are disposed both to adore and to defy—is he to shrink from asserting the importance of every other Polling; that's what you really mean, you two loving-hearted, blunder-headed geese."

She turns to Edith with a gesture and a smile that robs her words of all sting as she says this. And the younger Miss Polling is quick to understand that this stranger at their gates *really* desires that peace and goodwill should reign.

But Aunt Nellie, though she likes Mabel Sutherland, and thinks there must be some

good in a girl who sees beauty in the billows, whatever guise they roll up in on this portion of the Cornish coast, is not so easily appeased by the diplomatic smile and manner.

"I can conscientiously say that *I* require no sort of recognition from my nephew unless he is quite prepared to yield it, Miss Sutherland," she says, with a most embarrassing amount of dignity, that may develop into tearful fury, in her manner.

But Mabel is possessed of that tact which springs from the combination of gentle blood with gentle heartedness. So, in a few moments, she has made the woman who is almost savage in her sensitiveness feel that she (Mabel) sees nothing either ridiculous or uncalled for in the anxiety which she (Aunt Nellie) is displaying about the visit of the bride-elect and the future conduct of the bridegroom.

"And now, Aunt Nellie," Edith says,

addressing that lady confidentially, when she has been coaxed back into her normal state of rough-and-tumble good-humour—"And now, Aunt Nellie, let us beg Miss Sutherland to grant us the favour we came on purpose to ask?"

"To be sure!" Aunt Nellie says, forgetting all her imaginary grievances *in re* this family derangement at once. "What we shall do unless Miss Sutherland lends us her wise little head and helps us to do it, I'm sure I don't know; we were thinking, my dear Miss Sutherland, that, while Mr Romilly and Miss Field are staying with us, it would be a nice change for you—"

"A nice change, and a delightful thing for us, if you would come and stay at Pollington?" Edith cuts in, blushing furiously; but Aunt Nellie is not to be balked of her "say."

"The very thing I was saying, Edith, my dear; only young people think, in these

days, that unless they take the words out of the mouths of those who've lived before them, nothing will be said properly. A nice change, and a delightful thing for Miss Sutherland to come to Pollington and have a share in all the gaiety that will be going on—"

"In Miss Field, Mr Romilly, and your nephew, Mr Shelley," Mabel puts in jokingly; and Aunt Nellie gets upon her stilts at once, and replies,—

"No, Miss Sutherland; my nephew Shelley is engaged. You can have no share in him."

CHAPTER IV.

FOUND.

IF it has been a matter of genuine astonishment to Mabel Sutherland to hear that Mr Romilly is coming to Pollington, so is it not to that schemer to hear, on his arrival, from Shelley Polling, that he "has come at a good time, for they have got for a temporary neighbour one of the nicest girls in the world, a Miss Sutherland, an awfully pretty girl, and clever too."

It rather amuses Val Romilly to hear the girl, who might have been my lady the Countess if she had pleased by this time, described in this way by a man whose

experiences of girls of "good form" cannot (Val thinks) have been of the widest. But he listens to all that is said of the adventurous young lady with an encouraging smile, and is gratified to find that his scheme is likely to result in bringing him face to face with "a regular brick as well as a regular beauty!" according to Shelley Polling.

He has tracked her down rather cleverly. Having gathered from Frank that the object of his ardent affection has gone away with her aunt Mrs Trafford's knowledge and consent, he is convinced that there is nothing wrong in her disappearance. This conviction creates a further interest in her, and by dint of exercising a fair amount of diplomatic talent, he obtains an introduction to the Traffords (with whom his noble relative holds no manner of terms now), and craftily from Mrs Trafford obtains a fair amount of information relative to her niece's tastes and pursuits.

"She is a clever artist, and means to live by painting until her uncle will promise through me never to pester her about marrying that horrible man — forgive me, Mr Romilly, for speaking in that way of your uncle; but he is a horrible man."

"He is," Val assents, promptly; "but how, if you don't know where she is, can you communicate with Miss Sutherland?" he adds, speciously; and the old lady sees through his thinly-veiled desire to make her fall into a trap, and baffles him sweetly.

"Where there is a will there's a way, Mr Romilly. When I think it desirable to disturb my niece's seclusion, I shall find the way to do so; at present I am satisfied to know that she is well, happy, and" —here the old lady's pride in her niece's talent gets the better of her prudence— "successful in her profession."

Soon after this Mr Romilly takes his

leave, and Mrs Trafford congratulates herself on her discretion.

"He came to pump me," she tells herself, "and he has found out nothing, absolutely nothing! Ah, me! how much more smoothly all things would run on in *this* world if all women could control their tongues as I can."

Meanwhile Mr Val Romilly goes away in quite as self-congratulatory a frame of mind as that in which the lady is whom he leaves behind him. Those last words of Mrs Trafford's—"success in her profession"—have given him a clue.

"What can her 'profession' be but that of an artist? Her aunt has been expatiating on her love and talent for drawing!" On this hint he works.

'Twere long to tell, and vain to hear, how many hours and days he spends in haunting every art exhibition that is open in London. He goes through them with

the zeal of a detective who is promised a large reward if he hunts down a criminal. And after all, if it ends in his finding Mabel Sutherland, what reward does this infatuated young man propose for himself? Nothing less than the pleasure of being able to put his friend, Frank Arbuthnot, on the track of the girl of his heart!

After futile wanderings of about three weeks' duration through apparently interminable galleries; after satiating himself with every type of the peculiar artistic mind as displayed on canvas, a happy thought strikes him, and he renews the quest with vigour.

But now it is the picture-dealers' shops that he haunts.

Instinctively he turns away from mere prettinesses. Even flower-painting (though he has a respect for certain unconventional and singularly bold studies of white peonies and broken bits of horse-chestnut

that he comes across) "is not the like *she* would take," he tells himself. At last one day, in a retiring, but old-established and excellently well-known shop in Maddox Street, he finds himself attracted by a bold study of swirling waves, meeting and curling over one another in a way that must have been seen to have been painted with this striking air of truth.

There is cleverness, originality, and a strong individual style in the painting of the little picture, and without dreaming that he holds the key of "her" whereabouts in his hand now, he picks it up to look at it more attentively.

He nearly drops it, such is his surprise and delight, when, in white letters at the right-hand corner of the picture, he sees sketchily painted in the artist's signature, "M. Sutherland."

"Yes," the master of the shop cries out, in a high-pitched foreign voice, as

he marks the expression of the gentleman's face, "that is a very clever picture, sir—oh, a very clever bit, indeed; and I know the young lady who painted it. I am a courier, and I have taken her family, that is her uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Trafford, to Italy and Switzerland many times, oh, so many times, and this young lady with them. So she comes to know me, and now she is in Cornwall painting, and she sends me her pictures to sell. And she frames them all herself, and gilds the frames; and for that picture I only ask three pounds ten."

The three pounds ten are forthcoming instantly from Val Romilly's never too full purse, and recklessly he finds himself ordering, "More, as many more as he can have, at any price the lady likes to name."

The intelligent master of the shop is far too well versed in the ways that are

common to all humanity, to suffer the smile that is inside him to appear upon the surface of his face. But he puts two and two together, and remembering what the society papers had said relative to "the marriage which has been arranged between the Earl of Wokington and the beautiful and accomplished Miss Mabel Sutherland," he resolves to offer no let or hindrance to the enthusiasm in her behalf of this young gentleman, whom he knows to be his lordship's nephew.

Accordingly, in the most innocently incidental way, he takes out a memorandum which he has received from Miss Sutherland as to the price of some of her pictures, and drops it on the counter close to Mr Romilly, while he goes off to show some rare old jewellery to another customer.

During his absence, Val Romilly has time to note the address,—"The Cottage, Porthallow, Cornwall."

And this is the reason why he finds that business calls him to Penzance, and remembers the claims of old friendship with Godolphin Polling.

With the precious picture in his portmanteau, he arrives at Pollington, after a twelve-mile drive from Penzance, about eleven o'clock in the morning, having come down by the night train, and transacted his imaginary business at Penzance in a very brief space of time, and with no further difficulty or trouble than that caused by drinking a brandy-and-soda while gazing at the sea from the hotel window.

There is something very fascinating to him as he approaches grand old battlemented Pollington in the thought that, perhaps, in a few days he may be wandering through the fern-carpeted woods that stretch inland from the castle with the girl who has run away from his uncle, and, perhaps, by so doing, has preserved his

heirship intact. What is to happen if she is as pretty and charming as he has heard her described to be, and he sees much of her down in this desolate, dangerously romantic place, he does not stay to ask himself.

"Sufficient for the day is the good thereof," he says, transposing the proverb to suit his own view of the probable case. Then he jumps out at a grand entrance-door, pulls a colossal bell, and is presently welcomed "to Pollington" by an old man and a young one, who might stand respectively as models for an old and young Hercules, and by a fairy-figured girl, who "ought to be called Daphne," he thinks to himself, as he looks into her fair blushing face.

"Can this shy girl be the one who has flown from the highest social honours to a life of work and dulness? Can this be the truant beauty whom he has chased into the wilds?" It is an infinite relief to him to be able to answer "No" to these

questions as the grand old gentleman, his host, calls the shy fairy forward, and introduces him (Val) to her in this way,—

"Your brother Dolph's friend, Mr Romilly, my darling; my daughter, Edith Polling."

"A darling, I can see, at a glance; but not *the* darling to reward a man for having come such a wild-goose chase as I have come," Val Romilly says to himself, as he impressively returns the greeting the young Cornish lady gives him, and—looks behind her for another.

The other that he seeks is not there, but Aunt Nellie is, full of bustling, friendly eagerness to have his luggage taken in to the right room, and to hear how much the driver has had the conscience to charge him for coming from Penzance —full to overflowing, in fact, with that Martha-like spirit which assures a man that his bodily comforts shall be well

looked after during his sojourn in any house in which she has rule.

"The time *will* come," Val Romilly tells himself resignedly, as he submits to be taken in charge by healthy, good-natured Aunt Nellie, who takes it for granted that, because he is Godolphin's friend, he will take an interest in the cattle and pigs and poultry that are reared on the estate that will be Godolphin's by-and-by. "The time *will* come! But when? Why don't they say something that will give me a chance of asking what sort of neighbours they have? If the M. Sutherland, whose precious little painting has brought me here, doesn't turn up in the course of this morning's conversation, I shall go back to town a baffled man."

They are taking a tour through the spacious stable department as Val thinks this, looking at a number of good-bred,

well-groomed hunters and hacks. Presently they pause at a loose-box, in which a beautiful grey mare full of courage and gentleness is standing. As she wheels round, in obedience to Shelley Pollington's voice, and comes towards them, Edith Polling says,—

"I wonder if Flora will like 'Queen Mab,' Shelley?"

"Can't help it," Shelley answers, caressing the beautiful head that is thrusting itself forward confidingly; "she's a perfect lady's hack, and a splendid galloper. Flora will always be in a good place on 'Queen Mab!'"

"Is Flora another Miss Polling? A younger sister at school, I suppose?" Val Romilly asks, and Shelley blushes a little, while the others laughingly explain to him who Flora is, and what relation she is shortly to bear to them.

"I tell Shelley that Miss Field will be

jealous," Edith continues; "he has called this mare, that he means for Miss Field to ride, 'Queen Mab,' after a very pretty friend of mine."

Now it is that Shelley makes that speech which has been already recorded.

"Yes, you've come at a good time, Mr Romilly, for we've got for a temporary neighbour one of the nicest girls in the world — a Miss Sutherland, an awfully pretty girl, good form and clever too."

"Indeed. Is she the 'Queen Mab'?" Val says, scarcely able to conceal his delight at this successful termination to his quest.

"Yes," Edith explains, "I find her own family always called her 'Queen Mab,' so I've taken up the trick, and Shelley copies me as far as he dares; but he has called this mare after her, but I tell him Miss Field will make him alter the name. I tell you what I intend, Mr Romilly; I intend

Dolph to fall in love with Miss Sutherland; isn't it a beautiful plan?"

"Beautiful!" Val says drily.

"And don't you hope that it may be carried out? You like Dolph, I know. Don't you hope he may marry Miss Sutherland, and have a lovely, charming wife as well as Shelley?"

"What nonsense you talk, Edith," Aunt Nellie cuts in, with what sounds and looks like a paroxysm of rage (and for one Val Romilly is heartily inclined to agree with her). "What nonsense you talk, Edith. As if your brother Godolphin, who wants every penny he has or ever will have to spend on himself and his own extravagances, can afford to come home and marry every pretty girl who pleases to come down and paint on the coast!"

"Not every girl, that would be horrid bigamy; but this one girl I do wish Dolph to see and like; and Dolph is *not* extrava-

gant, Aunt Nellie. I won't hear him called it by any one, dear old Dolph."

"Anything that hits her brother Godolphin, hits Edith hard," the old Squire says, as they leave "Queen Mab's" loose-box, after this passage of arms between his sister and his daughter.

And Valentine Romilly politely says *he* would like "to be hit hard himself any time for the sake of eliciting such sweet championship." At the same time he thinks Edith's plan about bringing her brother and Mabel Sutherland together a very silly one, and in his heart endorses Aunt Nellie's sentiments on the subject.

"Well, you'll soon have an opportunity of forming an opinion about Miss Sutherland yourself, Mr Romilly," Aunt Nellie says, speaking very fast, and running her words together in a way that is still suggestive of stormy feeling, while in reality she is in one of her balmiest moods. "You'll

soon have an opportunity of forming an opinion of Miss Sutherland, for she is coming to Pollington this afternoon to stay a few days. Nice change for her, you know."

"For *us*, you mean, Aunt Nellie," Edith interrupts gently, and Aunt Nellie responds reprovingly,—

"My dear, I know what I'm talking about quite well; it's a very nice change, indeed, for any person to come to Pollington, and especially for any one leading such a lonely dull life as this poor girl leads. Oh! I can assure you, Mr Romilly, I never neglect people because they happen to be living in a humbler way than I am myself, like some people I could name if I pleased, but shall not do it. It's quite true that when Miss Sutherland came down here first, before I knew what sort of a conducted young person she was, that I begged Edith to be careful how she became intimate with

her; but now I'm sure no one can be more willing to show Miss Sutherland kindness and attention than I am; though, to be sure, she's a little outspoken and thoughtless at times."

So Aunt Nellie rambles on *ad libitum*, grating over some of Val's finer feelings concerning this unknown queen of his soul in the course of her rambling.

Yes; it has come to this: Val Romilly, who started in the quest of Mabel Sutherland in an idle, amiably-jesting spirit, has fallen in love with an ideal Mabel, and cannot bear to hear her discussed in a common-place way by a common-place woman, however kindly that woman may mean. Alas! for him. For if the ideal Mabel is dangerous to his peace of mind, and destructive to that loyalty to Frank Arbuthnot which was his at the outset, how much more dangerous will the real Mabel be?

They have luncheon at one o'clock at Pollington, and at luncheon plans for the pleasant passing of the afternoon are mooted and discussed.

"Ride round the farm with me?" Shelley says to the guest.

"My dear Shelley," Aunt Nellie, ever ready with an amendment, puts in, "I should think Mr Romilly would far rather have a nice drive to Kynance or Mullion with your father and me."

Val feels his heart sinking at the prospect, but a strong sense of courtesy bears him up.

"What are *your* plans, Miss Polling?" he asks; and she tells him,—

"I'm going to drive down in the pony-trap to the Cottage at Porthhallow, to fetch Miss Sutherland."

"Alone?"

"Yes; we do these things here, you know, Mr Romilly; to drive about un-

trammelled by a groom is one of our privileges."

"Let *me* be your squire on this occasion?" he pleads; and Edith, after one nervous glance at the Squire, reading no disapprobation of the proposition in his face, assents.

By-and-by, in spite of a good many adverse looks and inuendoes from Aunt Nellie, they start in the pony-trap, to Val's intense delight. He is so eager to see the object of his mad-cap search, that the drive, lovely as it is, seems long; and his companion, fresh, pleasant, and pretty as she is, seems tedious.

By the time they reach the wicket-gate which opens into the little enclosure in front of the Cottage at Porthhallow, Val is pale from suppressed impatience. In a few moments more he is in the little studio, bowing low before the brave-faced beauty who has run away from a coronet; flushed

to the roots of his hair at the sight of the girl whom he thanks God fervently he did not see first as his uncle's wife—his aunt!

Something of the comicality of this possibility strikes them both simultaneously. They both smile and look confused, and then Mabel holds her hand out frankly, and says,—

"You won't tell your uncle, will you, Mr Romilly? for he would tell mine."

END OF VOL. I.

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